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THE CLOCK OF ABEA

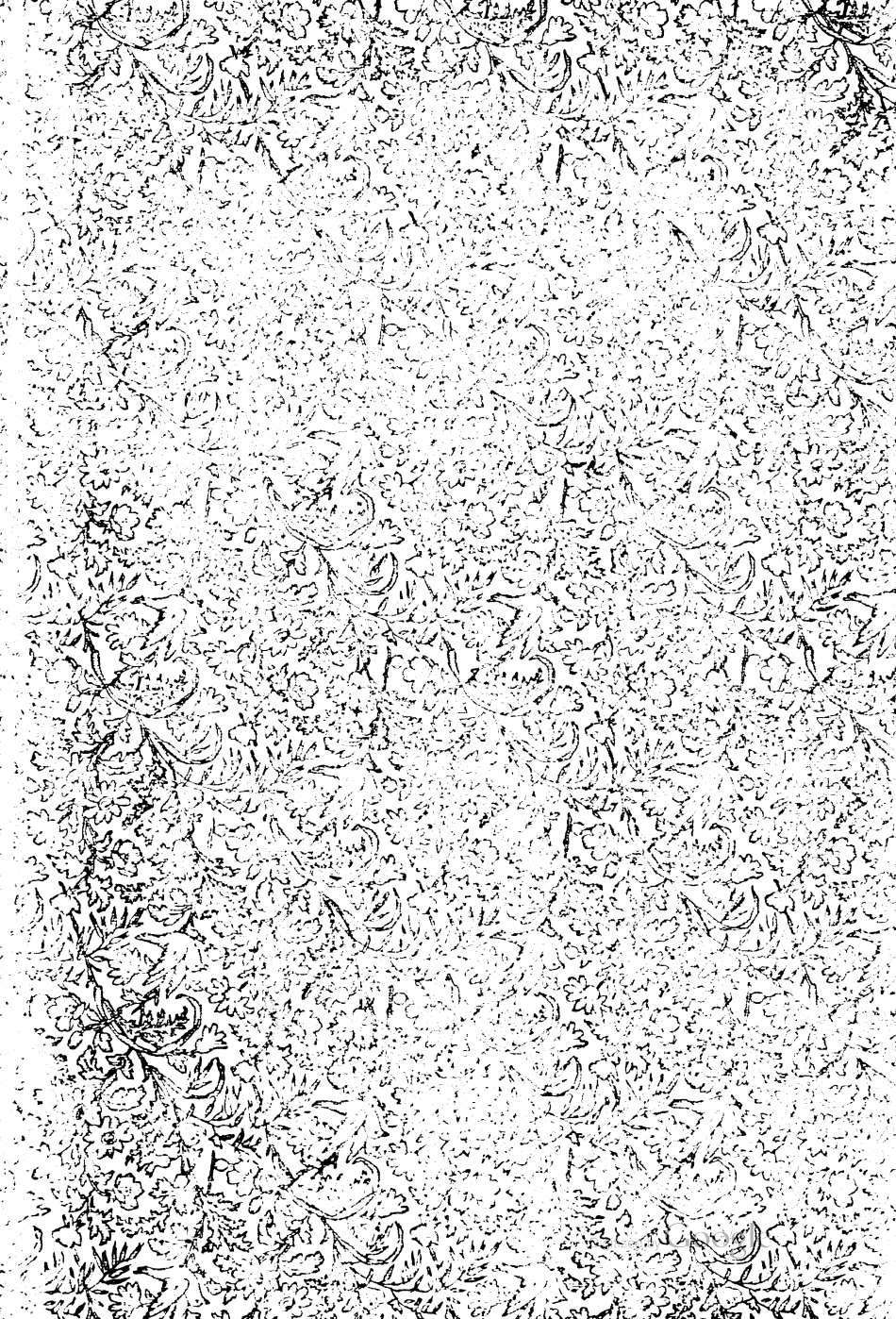
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THE CLOCK OF ARBA

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GLEAMS THROUGH THE GLOOM

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

A ROMANCE

BY

MARCUS S. C. RICKARDS

AUTHOR OF

'CREATION'S HOPE,' 'THE EXILES,' ETC.



J. BAKER AND SON
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T

THE story, told in a variety of metres, is printed in large type throughout. The poems in small type at the beginning or end of many of the sections are mostly independent of the narrative, although they generally bear upon the subject-matter of the section which they either head or finish.

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

A ROMANCE



PRELUDE.

BEHOLD the Clock of Arba rise,
From the green earth and sunlit sea
In grandeur to the solemn Skies
Wherewith it claims affinity!
'Tis rumoured that it wears a glow
Which some affirm will come and go,
As if a hidden spirit shone
And faded, ever and anon.

The hands that mark each wingèd hour
Oft glance with an unearthly light,
Nor ever fail, as tho' a power
Unerring set, and keeps them, right.
And curious eyes have watched the disc
Round which they move, and, at the risk
Of contradiction flat, have sworn
That all a human look hath worn.

And oft a peal rings out, as tho'
The accents of a human voice

I

B

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

From deep emotion's ebb and flow
Bade men now wail, and now rejoice.
At first, they say, two bells alone
Rang out the hours in doubtful tone ;
But now that strange, melodious chime
Would make all know the worth of Time.

How, where, and why the change was wrought
This poem shall relate to you ;
But to enjoy the tale, ye ought
To picture up the Clock to view.
Save for the glow, and altered sound,
And sculptured ornaments around,
It is as it hath been of old,
Both in machinery and mould.

'Tis tabernacled in a Tower
Of weird and even ghostly form,
And yet of massive make, whose power
Could weather an eternal storm.
Its age no human being knows,
Or why 'twas built, or when it rose.
If planned Above, 'twas surely fixed
When giants with mere mortals mixed.

So say the men of Arba, since
'Twas built long ere the Town began ;
Nor could you one of them convince
That aught of it arose from man.

PRELUDE

The lords of Arba owned the site
For ages past, yet throw no light
Upon its origin, but say
That when their clan was green, 'twas grey.

All hold it now for what 'twas meant
Undoubtedly to signify—
The Clock and Tower well represent
Brief Time and long Eternity.
A carven Angel is, they think,
Between the two a mystic link.
Above the flight of Time he stands
To beckon with uplifted hands.

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

I.

The tranquil Long Ago
Could charm the troubled Now,
As Youth's wild front reflects the glow
On Age's lofty brow,
If the vain Now would hear
The Long Ago's strange lore :
As Youth attends with smile and tear
To Age's tale of yore.
Hear, Now ! a lay of guile
From fairy Long Ago,
Which, if it wake not tear or smile,
Recounts both weal and woe—
Weal none can ever miss
Who keep an equal course ;
Woe due to all that barter bliss
For wrong, and sure remorse.

FAIR bloomed the flowers one gentle morn of
Spring

In the grey college green round Paul and Guy,
And softly did the laurelled blackbirds sing
The while they lingered o'er a sad good-bye ;
For haunts of boyish bliss, with many a thing
That even men scarce quit with tearless eye,
Must soon be left, and they, tho' lifelong friends,
Stood now on separate ways for different ends.
Their natures were apart. Guy, more aflush
With glow and grace than yon most flaming flower,

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

Had feeling that upwelled like the pure gush
Of the best warbler in the cloistered bower,
And buoyancy that naught could wholly crush,
Not e'en the prospect of the parting hour.
How could he sigh for long, this heir of wealth,
High opportunity and boundless health ?

But Paul was cast in quite another mould ;
Of look severe, and somewhat grave address,
He pondered oft as one untimely old,
Or one at least whom weighty cares oppress.
Reserved and proud, and, if the truth be told,
Somewhat repellent, a strange tenderness
Woke in his look and accents for the boy
Who now for years had shared his grief and joy.

Altho' the two were nearly of an age,
He was almost the father, Guy the son ;
Not that he played the elder, guide, or sage,
Or haply he no influence had won.
'Twas unassumed, a moral parentage
That owns unclaimed obedience, as the sun
Wins a free homage from the earth below,
A debtor to its life and heat and glow.

Best for unstable youth, and good for all
That, half unconsciously, they feel the force
Of some benignant will, some gentle thrall,
Whose kind decrees they honour and endorse,

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

As strong to hinder them from slip or fall
Mid life's uncertain path, or devious course.
The stormy heart-sea lacks a heavenly boon
If its wild tides set not to some calm moon.

Awhile they talked of the fast dying time
Of sweetness that no bitter memory sours,
The rough and smooth that train for manhood's
prime,
The studious moments, and the frolic hours,
Wherein they learnt their part in the world's chime,
Like fledglings taught to warble mid the bowers ;
Ere long they vowed, wherever they might roam,
To reunite in Guy's ancestral home.

The only child of Arba's mighty lord,
Swift would he now his heritage regain,
To be reloved, refêted, readored,
And, if he willed it, there for good remain,
As when a bow whose tension snaps the cord
Flies backward, and is straightened once again—
Ay, once again, for, grievous to relate,
Guy's bent had been to swerve from what was
straight.

Wilful and wayward, of amusement fond,
The idol of a gay and giddy set,
Thro' golden hours he played, nor looked beyond,
Nor trained his heart and hand to pay the debt,

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

The solemn duty bound by many a bond
On all like him who wear a coronet—
Nay, all whom fitful Fortune deigns to bless
With money, leisure, health and happiness.

And that, tho' dedicate to a high end,
As he in a true hour once owned to Paul,
Pledged by a dying mother so to spend
This life, from rosy dawn to grey nightfall,
That hearts less fortunate might comprehend
The better what smooth sense half-veils from all,
Time's priceless value, and adorn the hours
Of being with the fruitage of their powers.

And since her death a subtle influence
Had oft recalled the idler to a task :
Oft on the brink of evil a strange sense
Had held him back, and torn away the mask
From mischief to avert the consequence ;
And, when in life's vain sunshine he would bask,
Shewn that the very hands of Arba Clock
By their activity his own did mock.

Paul too had kept the higher sense alive,
And dared, while others flattered him, to blame.
And as one set to mind a fire will strive
On bended knees to fan a fainting flame,
Or add more fuel if the heat revive,
So did he oft rekindle dying shame

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

By pleading, and heap up a new supply
Of glowing hope and burning memory.
'And now,' said Paul, 'we part, alas! and I
Forthwith prepare for my predestined life—
A lot that will my yearning satisfy,
An advocate's career of busy strife.
For you, so rich, I dare to prophesy
Hard work and honour, and a heaven-born wife—
You proving Time's true value upon Earth;
And she, perchance, Eternity's high worth.

II.

Two streams from a pure source,
That, ere departing, smiled,
Have met—one clear throughout its course,
One turbid and defiled.

Two seeds that looked the same,
Dropped in one garden space,
Yield—this the flower and fruit, of shame,
And that, of lofty grace.

Two nests in a green bush,
Much outwardly alike,
Have cradled—one, a joyful thrush,
One, a mute murderous shrike.

Two sons of a good sire,
Who start with promise bright,
Will—this, the hell of wrong desire,
And that, the heaven of right.

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

Two pupils from a school,
Of culture and renown,
Wear, one the cap of the vain fool,
The other Wisdom's crown.

To him who answers why,
The world would be attent :
He would have solved the mystery
Of good with evil blent.

How quietly Dame Fortune mars our plans,
So like the sex that pulls the wires and springs!
(For life's true game is Woman's, and not Man's :
'Tis she who orders and unsettles things.)
Keenly as Paul and Guy had longed to meet,
Two years had fled before they faced anew ;
When, lo ! by chance in a far city street
Each saw the other, greatly changed to view.
As when we leave a haunt, in April-tide,
Of flowers unfolding, songsters in full tune,
And cuckoo-calling from the meadowside,
To find ripe beauty 'mid the silent June.
For full a minute neither of them spoke
('Tis ever thus when we have much to tell),
Then Guy, still volatile, the silence broke,
And with the air of one who had drunk well
Of the spiced cup that Pleasure fills for Youth,
Perchance too well, he jauntily explained,
Far too transparent to conceal the truth,
That in this city he was being trained

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

For the high duties of an ancient home.
His father, feeling he had much to learn,
And marking his anxiety to roam,
Had sent him thus away, and bade him turn
His mind to quiet study for a time.
'And I am far too dutiful a son
To waste the hours in this enchanted clime,'
Said he; 'I win the lore that must be won.
Life and the world I learn, nor ever slip
A golden chance of studying mankind,
And many a glistening eye and honeyed lip
By Love's own language hath enlarged my mind.
The burnished fly flits indolently on
Uncaptured by the charm of many a flower,
But I have settled on each face that shone,
To be well tutored for a sunny hour.
Ah! and a night moth, down the balmy gloom
Of a dim garden have I oft careered,
To flutter round, and pitch upon, one bloom,
One half-unfolded blossom that upreared
A gentle head to meet my ardent gaze.
Oh, let me tell that tale! Two friends and I
One evening wandered thro' a woodland maze,
To track a tuneful bird, when suddenly
We heard a rustle as of startled wings;
We hid, and held our breath, and past us flew
A trio, in shy haste, of timid things
Toward a shrubbery that met our view.

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

No fowler could so let his quarry free,
A Roman would have caught his fair Sabine :
Should these escape us? Never ! And so we
Pursued and captured them—one each ; and mine,
Mine was a goddess, and had she but prayed
To be a flower, and so elude my grasp,
The loveliest lily in that perfumed shade
Had been less fair ; yet, joy ! she did but gasp
A plea to be released ; for they, she cried,
Were pupils at a school, whose battlement
Thro' the thick trees and laurels we espied.
I quieted her quickly, and we blent
In murmured love : the birds began to stop
Their music before hers ; in shame or chivalry
The flowers took one long, hopeless stare, to drop
Their envious lids, nor dream of rivalry.
Her name was fitly Thea ; so divine
Her radiant face and figure looked that I
Held her as from another world than mine,
One who had borrowed beauty from the sky.
Her eyes were blue as morn ; as noonday glow
Her golden tresses. Zephyr-like there came
Sweet breath thro' lips curved like Diana's bow,
And ruddy as if fired from spirit flame.
The setting sun had glorified the west,
And I could thus compare the heavenly hue
With her warm blushes, vowing they were best ;
When lo ! she started suddenly in view

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

Of watching eyes ; and as before the moon
And stars, so coldly pure, the crimson pales,
Her cheek grew wan ; the laurels parting soon
Revealed a group of silvery gowns and veils,
Wherefrom one stepped, the chaste Superior,
The rest withdrawing, as when stars are hid
By clouds that make the moon look whiter, for
With livid lips she vowed she would be rid
Of pupils who had shamed their sex and state,
And bade them quit us, with a look of scorn.
We could not leave our charmers to their fate,
And gained her presence by finesse next morn,
And bore the blame, and pardon humbly craved ;
But found her adamant : They were expelled,
She said : I felt their honour must be saved,
So cried, " Your cruelty to them hath knelled
The fame and credit of your school ! Away
We go, to spread the tale of yester-eve—
But hold ! forgive them, and to our death-day
No word regarding it our lips shall leave."
The shaft went home, and, tho' with scanty grace,
She yielded, and allowed them to remain.
She little dreams how oft since then that face
Hath flushed to my low whisper—that a chain
Was forged that fiery night, whose golden links
Around our plighted spirits will resist
The force of that she-dragon to unloose, methinks.
Paul, have you ever loved ? Ah ! let me list

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

To some soft tale of folly now from you.
But lonely, pensive Paul had naught to tell ;
He had no care to win, no mind to woo.
The story that he told was of a spell
Of patient toil : let gilded nobles wed !
From them an heir was due ; but such as he
For one alone could earn the needful bread.
But this fair girl ! In Guy he could but see
The lurking libertine. Was she enough
To quench his vagrant amours, as each spring
From an admiring flock of reeves the ruff
Selects one consort ? Would they soon take wing
For some vain heaven, a wild, eloping pair,
Or now, or even after, would he wrong
Her trustfulness by other loves ? Who dare
Predict ? The talk Paul could no more prolong,
And Guy was in no mood to be advised ;
And so they parted, one to his affairs,
The other to new play—*this* with smooth brow,
And *that* with forehead lined from early cares.

III.

Is the gay lover free
Who hath united
One to his destiny
Whom he delighted—

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

Free in a frolic vein,
Tho' he her heart retain,
Even to loose the chain
Of the vow plighted ?

Free as the fervent sun
A world to brighten,
Yet when the day is done
Fail to enlighten ?
Free like the wanton breeze
Circling the willow trees,
Which if it rudely tease
Turn back to whiten ?

Nay, tho' at eve she spurn
Earthlike the splendour—
Tho' the pale willow turn
From the offender,
He is but free to keep
Watch till she round and weep ;
Or, like the gale, to sleep,
Waking more tender.

Free, not the tears to scorn,
The chain to sever ;
To leave her lone and lorn,
Free for that—never !
Till tearful earth shall miss
Aught of the matin bliss,
While winds the willows kiss
Love—and for ever !

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

The months that fly to eld and middle-age
Have crept to youthful Paul, and six have passed.
The Power whose part it is to turn each page
Of life's brief history hath closed the last.
To-day arrived at manhood, Paul hath cast
An anxious eye o'er letters just received.
Guy wrote that his bright spell had been o'ercast ;
For summoned back to Arba, he had sped
In haste and grief, alas ! to find his father dead.

And Thea wrote—she must have heard his name
From Guy—complaining he had gone away.
Rapt from the school, she, mindful of her fame,
Was promised marriage on an early day,
Till when she would not meet him more, but stay
With neighbouring friends, and letters oft had come
To cheer her, hopeful at the first and gay,
Yet shadowed latterly by hints of some
Brief hindrance to the match that must be overcome.

But now, alas ! she had not heard for long,
And he had left the country she was told.
Some harm must have befallen him, or wrong,
For he was ever lavish of his gold,
And somewhat venturesome and overbold :
So good and true he was, and so devout,
Tidings he would not willingly withhold :
His faith and honour she could never doubt ;
So she had left her friends to track the mystery out.

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

And they had hinted at her parentage,
And much beside, and she would know the fact.
A lawyer of his land she must engage,
Of youthful ardour, energy, and tact.
Was Paul inclined on her behalf to act?
If so, let him expect her soon, for she
With vain heart-hunger was so sorely racked
That she should cross the separating sea;
Far better know the worst than pine in misery!

Paul's brow grew cloudy, and anon was bright,
As April mists with sunshine alternate.
Guy hardly thus could wander from the Right,
And bring that trustful heart to such a strait!
He was in trouble o'er his father's fate,
Or letters had gone wrong—Paul therefore wrote
Nought but condolence for his college mate;
And for poor Thea's grief this antidote,
That his best care and skill he would to her devote.

A week, and she was with him in the room—
A face which Guy had rightly called divine,
Nor wrongly likened to a lily-bloom.
Never, thought Paul, did heaven and earth combine
In such perfection, or grief so refine
Charms far too rare, without it, for rude life.
She wept awhile, but as the sun will shine

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

With purer radiance after tearful strife,
She beamed till Paul half yearned for such an one
as wife.

And many an hour they talked, for her sad lot
Was like a spell his pensive heart to touch ;
And, truth to tell, he often half forgot
That he was but her hireling, for so much
She told him, and Guy's frailty was such
That Paul soon felt he had forsaken her,
Nor left her any shred of hope to clutch :
And so from loyalty one could not err
Who now assumed the rôle of friend and comforter.

Nay more—when soon it grew to certainty,
From private tidings, that the vicious youth
Had cast her off, Paul felt they both were free.
Yet should she hope awhile, nor know the truth ;
What lily could outlive such stormy ruth ?
She daily to his chambers came, and he
Dissembled with her daily, for in sooth
He feared her future, since he could foresee
Naught for her going back but shame and misery.

And yet without a thought of love, or word,
Paul counted soon no more by time or tide.
His sun arose when Thea's step was heard,
It sank in darkness when she left his side ;

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

To counsel her was Spring, and Summer-pride
Was at the full when she was led by him ;
His heart was Autumn when he had to hide
The withering truth from her, and Winter grim
While he beheld her eyes of beauty wet and dim.

Then working out her hints of parentage,
He wondered much at proving her to be
Of Arba stock, the Court her heritage,
If Guy should chance to fail of progeny.
The next in the entail had crossed the sea,
To wed clandestinely, and left this child,
Who never had been told her pedigree,
But, nurtured by a friend, was let run wild
Till placed in that far school whence she had been
beguiled.

This fully proved, while still she knew it not,
Paul wrote to Guy, nor left one fact untold.
A plaint more true and tender none e'er got,
Nor e'er did one a juster claim unfold.
It was a letter passionate and bold,
Begging not more for Thea's than his sake,
By all their intercourse and joy of old,
And this new cousinship of hers, to break
The wrongful silence, nor his plighted troth forsake.

' If aught will waken him,' thought Paul, ' 'tis this '
And tarried for an answer, but none came.

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

‘What, still asleep! From thy new dream of bliss,’
He cried, ‘the waking will be guilt and shame.’
He needed not a herald to proclaim,
So well he knew him, that the heartless Guy
Cared nothing now for Thea’s weal or fame;
Nay, that he might have made a life-long tie
Already, that would stamp his Past as villany.

IV.

Be the happy gale to me,
A lone barque on life’s calm sea,
That in tides of joy shall flow
To Love’s haven, if thou blow!

Be the radiant sun, for I
Now am as a shadowed sky.
Rend the gloom, and shew the world
Clouds dispelled, and vapours furled

Be the dew to softly fall
On my heart, and freshen all
The fair opening flowers, lest they,
Reft of beauty, fade away!

Be the showers that from above
Flow in gentle streams of love.
Bid my parched and barren earth
Yield a fruitage of rare worth!

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

Soft moonlight bathed the hoary walls
Of Arba Court one April night :
Dark silence reigned within the halls
Where danced full many a dame and knight.
The rout was o'er an hour ago ;
And sleep had curtained every eye,
And stilled the throb, and quenched the glow
Of all, except of ardent Guy—

Guy, now the lord of the domain,
Broad acres, and ancestral towers,
O'er which his sires and he did reign,
They for long ages, he for hours :
Since yestereve had crowned the day
When his full manhood took the throne,
And fêted all beneath the sway
That now he exercised alone.

Trustees had rendered their account,
And stewards undergone new hire :
Gifts had flowed freely from a fount
Of loyal love, and warm desire.
A ball the festal night had closed,
And haunted by one lingering tune,
Guy oped a casement that disclosed
The dreamy park, the brooding moon.

No harp or viol bore that tone,
Tho' music revelled at its birth ;

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

It reached his raptured ear alone
Mid Babel-melody and mirth.
For strangely, ay, and sadly soon,
Frail fancy was once more aflame ;
A girl's sweet whisper was the tune,
Her low consent to bear his name.

Strange blending ! happy fortune, too !
One Ida (all unknown to both)
Their sires had hoped that he would woo ;
And he had won her, nothing loath—
Their union would cement a bond
Between two ancient families,
Since her fair acres lay beyond
(For lovely leagues) a park of Guy's.

Tho' neighbours, they had never blent
Since early youth, for in those times
Maids of high lineage were sent
For tutoring to foreign climes.
But ah ! Guy's guilt, to her unknown,
Had kindled a deceptive light,
That bade him for the past atone
On other than the lines of Right.

With beauty, birth, and many a gift
And grace, he pondered, was she not
A woman who must needs uplift
The man who bade her share his lot ?

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

So he, aflame with this new love,
In that fond moonlit moment swore
His heart from hers should never rove,
And now a groveller would soar.

Ah! cruel, did he never think
Of Thea won and basely left,
And others who at ruin's brink
Were trembling now of him bereft?
That passion-flame was the one shrine
For sacrifice and holy vow;
But ah! there was no fire divine,
No fuel on that altar now.

Ida's sole image filled the heart
That now beneath the hallowing moon
Vowed a new life-way, a fresh start
To the strange magic of that tune—
When suddenly to his keen ear
This warning came from Arba Tower,
To fill him with a nameless fear,
While it rang out the midnight hour—

Beware, nor do
The deed of wrong,
Or Time for you;
Will not be long!

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

Repent, or it
May be too late,
For none outwit
Avenging Fate!

V.

O the beautiful pink of the dawn!
O the magical promise of spring!
O the wonderful view when the veil is withdrawn
By young Love from the joy he doth bring!
The hour is the dimmest of day,
The season the prime of the year,
When Beauty sits lone on the beach of the bay,
To dream of delights that are near.

Long vacant are chamber and bed,
Tho' all in the house are asleep.
What couch or soft cushion can pillow a head
That thro' vistas of glory doth peep?
One outlook alone could lend ease
From the turmoil and fever within—
The song of the wave, and the breath of the breeze,
And the watching for day to begin.

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

So Ida arose to perform
The due of the body and soul ;
And quietly mantling her fairylike form,
She thro' the still corridors stole,
And snowdrops and primroses seemed
To lift waking eyes as she walked,
While drowsy larks dreamed that a seraph had
gleamed
And twittered, or tunefully talked.

And reaching a shore-bounded field,
The plovers a welcome pipe out ;
And a curlew, whose lids by her steps are unsealed,
Eyes her figure as tho' half in doubt ;
But when o'er the ridge she doth gaze,
He chimes with the sea-fowl on shore,
That pierce the dim haze with the wild matin-praise
Of one whom all creatures adore.

They chatter and feed within reach,
Sole voices and steps near her now,
As she dreamily sits on the wave-beaten beach,
The breath of the morn on her brow.
Her eyes wander o'er the blue main,
Her rapture no pen can portray,
But the gossiping birds blab the story out plain
And the billows her secret betray.

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

‘O what a change hath come since yesterday—
Come to this pulsing heart, come o’er my life!
Till then, methought that could I have my way,
No voice should ever woo or call me wife!
No languishing for me, no fevered strife!
Earth’s folly jarred on me who looked above.
False heart, doth that high calm now yield to
troubled love?

Else why wert thou as smooth till yestereve
As the moon-silvered bay I then beheld?
Why now as rough as this, whose waters heave
In presage of a storm not lightly quelled?
Methought the striking of the midnight knelled
My girlhood’s peace; and now I feel ’tis lost,
Like rippling calm dissolved in rainbow foam
uptossed.

And yet I would not have it otherwise.
My life, till then as grey as twilit gloom,
Will soon be rosy as yon orient skies
Which the hid sun, whose fiery rays will bloom
The restless sea, doth even now illumine.
Farewell cold shadows of a bygone night!
Welcome warm beams of day, and chequered joys
of light!

How came it? Let me think—one mutual look
Sufficed to show me his transcendent worth,

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

And tell a tale no woman e'er mistook.
Love may be born 'mid scenes of thronging mirth ;
That look revealed the moment of its birth.
I moved away, nor stole another glance,
Till, when they made us known, we mingled in the
dance.

Yet strangely, even then we never spoke,
Till, whirl and music ended, we sat down ;
When he in ardent tones the silence broke
With words too tender ; yet I could not frown.
That melody the minstrels did not drown
When they rechimed ; and ere the night was flown
He begged me to be his, I had him for my own.

Unmaidenly or premature ? Not so !
I, who deem love the outcome of the Past,
And of His will Who orders all below,
Felt sure that each was for the other cast,
Nor for a moment held the wooing overfast.
Heaven made us meet that night, as two betrothed
In otherclimes before earth's form our spirits clothed.

Kind memory, keep the precious things he said
For me to banquet on ! Enough that now
I recollect he whispered we must wed ;
That when to her who bore me our quick vow

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

Was told, she did not wholly disallow
His ardent suit (how could she with that smile?),
But bade him prove his love, and wait a little while.

My sun rise quicker than yon drowsy orb!
Be never tempest of thy glitter born;
All mists that cling around my past absorb;
And gild the murmuring heart-waves when they
mourn.

Bid bygone hopes, unwelcome and forlorn,
A seaward flight to the horizon wing,
Like autumn birds that flit, returning not in spring!

Love, I have mocked thee till now, for no mortal,
Wearing thy livery even, hath bent
Eager and suppliant at the chill portal
Of my lone spirit, serenely content !

Now thou art bodied in one that entices
With the low whisper whose breath is thy life.
Balm more benign than from Araby's spices
Flows from the lips that would hail me as wife.

Earth, be she never so wintry, unfreezes
To the warm zephyr, and springs into flower :
Murmur again, and I melt to the breezes,
Blooming anon to their life-giving power !

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

VI.

Then Guy, unwont to early rise,
Appeared before her lifted eyes,
To take a laughing lover's due
And watch with her the golden view—
The fleecy clouds, whose shadows seem
Heaven's forecast on love's fairy dream :
The dancing waves, the sunny glint
That chances on a sail, to hint
How Fortune gilds *this* human barque
Upon life's main, and leaves *that* dark—
They took all in, or Ida did,
At once, and Guy was gently chid
For blindness to delight around,
And deafness to the common sound,
And dumbness ; for her children could
Interpret Nature if they would.
'Nay, teach me, Ida !' he replied,
And drew her closely to his side.
'Clear the dim eyes, and leave them free
To view the ships on life's sad sea !
The ears now open, shut too long
To all but merriment and song !
Thro' thy sweet magic may my tongue
Sing all that thou thro' life hast sung.
I covet thy imaginings ;
Help Fancy to unfurl her wings !'

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

And Love has such a power to purge
The sense, and carry to the verge
Of what our finite mind can view,
And lends so keen an insight too,
That hardly half an hour flew by
Ere Ida had enlightened Guy,
Unsealed his ear, and fired his lips
To talk of wave, and gleam, and ships,
The shore-bird's pipe, the seamew's scream,
The myriad water-things that teem,
The lights that sleep on Ocean's breast
Like shining souls in heavenly Rest,
And all the pomp and pageantry
Of Nature queening it at sea.
Alas! that the fair World above
Was not uncurtained to their love ;
For passion paralysed the power
Of Ida's in that golden hour
Columbus-like to boldly sail
Thro' sense's ocean, and unveil
The Beauty men will own as best
At life's calm sunset in the west.
For had her love been then quite purged
From earthly taint, it might have urged
Their embarkation in one ship
To Heaven, whose glories she with lip
Fire-touched might show were partly won
Before the sinking of life's sun.

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

And had they plainly viewed the Whole
Here viewed in part by many a soul ;
Had they with spirit-lids unsealed
But looked behind the unrevealed
Like early saints and martyrs, ay,
All mortals, maybe, ere they die,
This tale might never have been told ;
For gazers there would now behold
Mid angel-myrriads one who bent
Before the lovers, with intent
To influence each flaming heart
Not to commingle, but to part.
A mother would arrest a son
From what had hardly been begun,
And hold a maiden pure and good
From woe and moral widowhood.
Guy felt the subtle influence ;
And Ida, less enthralled to sense,
Was racked by sudden doubts and fears,
And bade him thro' fast falling tears
Back to his liberty, for she
Felt strangely prompted to be free.
Nor was it till he had employed
A full persuasion, that she joyed
His heart by telling him that now
Unchanging she would keep her vow.
Then, language failing them awhile,
A happy silence they beguile

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

By means to lovers not unknown
Who dream upon the shore alone ;
Till, weary of the sweet repose,
They for an inland ramble rose
Mid such a blithe, melodious burst
That Ida, in bird-music versed,
Bethought her of a charming lay
That had been lent her yesterday,
As half-interpreting the song,
And read it while they strolled along.

We are coming on the breezes
Soft and balmy, that are blowing
To atone for booming thunder,
Bleak and bitter air that freezes,
Blinding rain and sudden snowing :
 These that hindered us have fled.
When you see us do not wonder !
Men believe us, but they blunder,
 To be merely birds that shed
 Brightness on the flowery plain,
 Music thro' the leafy lane.
Summer migrants they but name us,
And unconsciously defame us.

We are coming notwithstanding :
Even so we wake emotion,
Thrilling many a heart with pleasure.
Flocks this very hour are landing
From a flight o'er billowy ocean.
 Hosts are on a desert way.

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

Watch us closely at your leisure,
And a heart-consoling treasure
Will your scrutiny repay !
Hearken to the hymns we raise,
Matin-prayer and vesper-praise,
Some mid flowers and foliage flitting,
Others wooing, building, sitting !

We are coming, each an angel,
If you will, a sprite, a fairy,
From unutterable glory ;
Wafting thence a sweet evangel
Of delight to all the weary,
All the loyal, here we rest,
To depart ere Winter hoary.
If ye but enjoy our story
Name us what you reckon best—
This a virtue, that a grace,
Flown from Heaven into Space,
Myriad-winged incarnate Beauty
Charming men to Truth and Duty.

We are coming as the rapture
Of the sunbeams follows darkness,
Flashing like the golden glances
Youth beholds but cannot capture—
Leaving dreary gloom and starkness
For an autumn legacy.
Dazzling you like happy chances,
And full many a hope that dances
Fitfully awhile, to flee.

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

Yet, unlike your earthly bliss
At the loveliest, in this—
That we leave no empty yearning
But the promise of returning !

The ramble led them thro' a lane,
So green and flowery they were fain
To linger there, while every bird
That in the April can be heard
A welcome trilled, and let them see
That they had its full sympathy.
The thrushes in melodious strife
Told Guy that they had each a wife ;
And Ida saw a blackbird hen
Upgazing at a poplar, when
A golden-lipped admirer sang
An ode that thro' the meadow rang,
As if to shew that Love's sweet game
For birds and maidens was the same.
A linnet fluttered from her nest
To waken longing in their breast,
Or feed the growing appetite
For household joy and home delight,
And the young cares that, born of love,
With wedded bliss are interwove.
Two magpies chattered from an oak
That human pairs seemed funny folk,
Content thro' greenery to roam,
While all the world now built a home.

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

Ah ! Guy, amid the revelry
And rapture that surrounded thee,
Did none—did nothing wake the thought
Of woe and shame on others brought ?
Did no bird-Counsel hold a brief
For Thea, and arraign the thief
Who stole her heart, nor cared to save
Her honour, and now played the knave ?
This leafy lane held many a sight
And sound which should have turned thee right :
The cooing wood-doves, joined for life,
Each nesting with an early wife,
The moping hens on spray and thorn,
Should have recalled her, sad and lorn.
The dirge for many a ruined nest,
The scream o'er robbers that molest
A mate, or may be callow young,
The elegy for truants sung
From elm or aspen, oak or fir,
Might well have made thee think of her.
Alas ! we but in Nature see
What hath our present sympathy.
Love, the great alchemist, now turned
All into gold that Guy discerned.
That which he willingly forgot
In the bright scene was mirrored not.
The need to consummate their bliss
Absorbed him, and all told of this.

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

VII.

The ramble o'er, they wander next
Thro' daisied meadows; and a text
Selected from fair Nature's book,
At that sweet open page, he took;
And eloquently did he preach
His views from all within their reach.
His subject—have you any doubt
Concerning that? Go, find it out!
Obey the pairing instinct, and
Guy's thesis you will understand.
His text—ah! look from earth Above,
And you will find it, 'God is Love.'
Yet live as he is doing now,
Alone to keep a passion-vow;
Care but for one of all the kind,
And be to others wholly blind;
Nay, for her only in so far
As she your comfort doth not mar,
And you, tho' free from vice and pelf,
Will like him, but believe in self,
Reverse the order of the words,
And, pointing to the blooms and birds
And flies, and reptiles on the sod,
Will argue out that 'Love is God,'
Claims worship as a due from all,
And holds morality in thrall:

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

For Nature, if thus backward read,
May prove a righteous Ruler dead.
Almighty Love Guy only saw,
And bade his Ida keep God's law.
Her, the impenitent, he tried
To humble, influence and guide.
'All who against Love's rule rebel,'
He urged, 'will find not heaven, but hell.
Quick union is the law,' he cried,
'For all who woo and win;' and tried
With craft to illustrate his theme
From features of the fairy dream
Thro' which they roamed, each wide awake,
At least, to what the other spake.
The butterflies of glowing hue,
Green, yellow, purple, red and blue,
Sailed by them on the rippling air
Alone, and swift became a pair;
The flaming lizards past them flew,
And mated in their very view;
In every hedge and bank a wealth
Of creeping things were wed by stealth—
Grey moths, green beetles, cuckoo-flies
Were married underneath their eyes.
'Look, Ida!' said the homilist,
The while her lips he fondly kissed,
Lest they should point him to some flaw
In logic, or still mock the Law—

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

‘Look at yon buttercupped expanse,
Yon glade that teems with cowslips; glance
At all the opening flowers that edge
The primrose bank, or star the hedge!
Could it be thus were aught in strife
For long against the Law of Life?’
But Ida, for a moment free,
Demurely pointed to a bee
In a campanula now belled
Alone, and asked why he rebelled,
And yet enjoyed a nectared bliss
Unmated, with but flowers to kiss.
‘Ah! Nature finds not only place
For laggards in the marriage race,
But for full many too,’ she said,
‘Who linger on thro’ life unwed.
And oft I fancy they do best
Who mock the nuptial tie and nest,
To spend life’s summer day as those
Whose simple joy and one repose
Is hiving honey for their kind
From every flower that they can find.’
But here the preacher thought it wise
To seal her lips and temporize.
‘I envy more the butterfly,’
He said, ‘with an attentive eye
Upon his spouse, a forager
From bell to bell who flits with her

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

Down life's green lawn, to find her grace
Enhanced by every flower's sweet face.
But, Ida dear, we speak of bells ;
The word, I know not why, foretells
Somewhat to come to me, while it
Recalls my past, as I admit.
A butterfly, alas ! unwed,
From bell to bell I long have sped.
From bell to bell, a toiling bee
Am I to pass, that men thro' me
May win what Time and Virtue yield
To workers in life's summer field ?
If so, 'twill be thro' you alone,
Who promise to become my own.'
But she still parried his request,
Well knowing her intent was best,
And thought to charm him off the line
By light caprice, or fancy fine.
' The fragrant field-bells all around,'
She said, ' can hardly fail of sound.
Stirred by the zephyr how they swing,
And, could we hear them, sweetly ring
With special note, with private tale !
The hare-bell, lily of the vale,
Wood-sorrel, and campanula,
Each sounding, may be, near and far.
Who hear them ? Genii, fays, and elves,
Hereafter haply, too, ourselves

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

With finer sense, again on Earth,
Attuned to them thro' a high birth?
Do angels bend o'er harps of gold
To hear the music sweetly told?
Yon lovely bluebells, are they now
(Moved by the breeze that cools my brow)
Telling free spirits in the wood
More than earth's best historian could?'
And Guy had heard her for an hour,
But that the bell from Arba Tower
Rang out an argument that he
Turned to his purpose cunningly ;
For he had quelled those midnight fears
And listened now with other ears.
Quoth he: 'I promised once the Town
That I my marriage joy would crown
By a new peal, that so I might
Make them partake of the delight.
Love, can you hear that discord now
And yet not help me keep my vow?'
Wise Ida, driven thus to bay
Could only beam on him and say :
'We both are weary ; on the shore
We will recline, and talk it o'er.'

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

VIII.

Then from the golden sands, and eloquent
As the pathetic waves, Guy urged his case ;
And Ida, waiting till his pleas were spent,
Thus firmly traversed them with tender grace :
' Dearest, I love thee ; let that happy truth
Atone for this—I will not wed thee now !
I hope thou lovest me, come weal or ruth ;
But haply thou wilt mourn too quick a vow.
Think me not heartless, it is but for thee :
Thy welfare claims not an immediate bride.
We mortals in our love are like the sea—
With some it is for ever brimful tide,
Unrippled oft, with waves all sensitive,
Merrily dancing to a golden sun,
And furrowed oft with billows fugitive,
But always full. Of them thou art not one.
With others it is constant ebb and flow :
Feeling that vaunted its stability
Recedes beneath a heaven of fading glow,
With tearful clouds, and winds that wail or sigh,
To settle down at length in sullen ease
Beyond a lifeless strand, a muddy reach ;
Until emotion stirs, and to a breeze
That freshens fast reflows toward the beach
Left long alone, in frothy furious waves
Tipped by the sun's new glory. Is it thus,

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

Dear Guy, with thee? Thine indignation raves
At the bare notion—but for both of us
'Tis best to prove thou art not self-deceived—
For thee, since thou would'st want another bride,
And leave my lonely heart a beach bereaved
For ever of a fluctuating tide—
For me, that I may shape a timely course :
I could not fail thee, yet would know the worst.
The current quits the coast, and with new force
Returns ; the coast remains as at the first.
I change the figure. As the moon will sit
Unclouded, thro' a wintry night, above
The sea that sets to her, I will not quit
One who to me should rise and fall in love.
Be life before the midnight, stormy, foul,
'Tis mine to watch and silver it. Tho' storms
Should lash the waves, tho' hurricanes should howl,
Tho' evil-omened birds and spectral forms
Scream or flit silent o'er the watery waste,
Still I brood over it, serene and true ;
And in the after-Day, whose dawn hath chased
The hurrying shades, I faint not in the Blue.
Not as the queen of Nature's night am I
In this, nor change I, but I shine on thee
For ever at the full—on thee, dear Guy,
While Time endures, and thro' Eternity !

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

IX.

World of beauty !
How can Duty
Claim us for her own at morning ?
Joy so pleasant,
Hope so present,
Nature in superb adorning.

Sky a glory,
Earth a story
Of delight, a sunlit Ocean,
Fields rejoicing,
Warblers voicing
Spirit-rapture, heart-emotion.

Skylarks chiming,
Heavenward climbing,
Thrushes with no tone of sadness,
All beginning,
Without sinning,
A bright day of idle gladness.

We immortals,
At the portals
Of a palace of pure pleasure,
Know the longing,
And the thronging,
To secure the fleeting treasure.

Should we ever
Care to sever

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

From this world, or win another,
If unchidden,
As forbidden
Thus the nobler aim to smother ?

Life of sweetness !
How can meetness
For full age, in youth be gendered ;
And eternal
Fruit for vernal
Seeds in harvest-time be rendered ?

Worldly brightness
And heart-lightness
Blend to make the spirit earth-bound.
A to-morrow
Sure to follow
Keeps her blithe, and gay, and mirth-bound.

Silk and satin
From the matin
Hour to vesper time enfold her ;
Are the splendour,
And the tender
Ties of sense, alone to mould her ?

She, a learner,
Needs a sterner
Tutor, a rough hand upon her ;
A reminder
That He find her
Not at last in shame, but honour.

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

As unheeding
Hearts hear pleading
Calls at dawn to toil and trouble,
So the youthful
Catch some truthful
Tones mid life's new rainbow bubble.

As at morning,
If the warning
Sound in vain, a hand may hasten,
So He borrows,
Oft from Sorrow's
Store, the wherewithal to chasten.

Lo ! distresses
For caresses
Come, and care and grief for rapture.
Thus a loving
One the roving
Heart of youth for weal would capture—

Then as glancing
Lights, and dancing
Sunbeams, gild the day's true working,
They who faltered
First, in altered
Action will find glory lurking.

A day's new gladness, and life's early glee
Combined to make the maiden, in whose heart
Joy fought with Trouble for supremacy,
Enthroned Delight and bid dull Grief depart :

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

And Thea as she wandered on the sands,
While morning breezes cooled her fevered brow,
And lifted straggling locks from loosened bands,
Mused upon Guy, their meeting and his vow.
As at the sun's first glance the night mist moved,
And in the golden outlook sped away,
So rising to his throne, the face she loved,
Imaged within, broke up her spirit's grey.
And weeping now no more, the sighs and fears,
Were hushed and dried like twilight gales and tears.

And many an emblem of her joy appeared.
Each ripple shimmered like her wave of life,
Now glory-tipped ; but soon it disappeared
In molten gold—like her, become his wife,
Merged in that bright eternity of bliss,
The destiny of all who truly love.
Then came a cloud rent by a sunbeam's kiss,
As when she sat and moped, his face above
Her gloom would bid it vanish quite ;
The Ocean smiles—upon the face of Time
Guy was a happy laugh ; sweet bells invite
To Matins o'er the sea—Guy was a chime
Whose music o'er the world's capricious main
Should call to Prayer and Praise, nor quite in vain.

The waves bear Ocean's message on their lip—
Guy was the prophet of Eternity ;

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

Clear strains come floating from a distant ship—
Guy was the echo of Heaven's harmony ;
Then as the meadow perfume thrilled her sense
It felt to her like wandering Guy—a whiff
From Paradise o'er her sad mortal fence,
Borne on the breeze of fickle Fate ; as if
Fragrance had crept into her life, alas !
A strange reminder of pre-natal things
To steep her in delicious joy, and pass,
Like every Angel, all high visitings,
Each shining glory from afar, unkept
Nor haply to return—and Thea wept.

For vanquished rebels lift the head again,
And Joy, tho' sceptred in her heart, began
To feel Woe mutiny against his reign,
With Care, and Fear, and many a partizan.
And every object in the changeful scene
Now claimed affinity to vanished Guy ;
The bliss will not return that once hath been ;
No resurrection waits the joys that die :
So spake her heart ; and was it fancy quite,
Or sudden clouds o'ershadowing the sun,
That azure Ocean turned to grey and white?
Fit sign that Love's cerulean race was run,
Or that her glowing course, now Guy had gone,
Was gloom that only with brief memories shone.

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

Ah ! how is it that we in woe refuse
The comfort Nature wafts on every gale ?
A flock of knots sped by whose sombre hues
Shot silver on the eye that watched their trail.
Thus oft o'er the sad ocean of the mind,
As if to mock the fading gold, there fly
Wild fancies, all with glory tipped and lined,
And flashing gleams of comfort by-and-bye.
In swallow-play a flight of hawking terns
Arrested Thea's eye : why saw she not
The hovering angel-joys that each discerns
Who uncomplainingly accepts his lot ?
Dark-breasted dunlin piping for the North
Called her heart Heavenward, yet it fared not forth.

For she, familiar with all sights marine,
Saw but the tokens of a tempest nigh,
Nor pierced the curtain Nature draws to screen
Approaching trouble from our scrutiny.
Nay, be it owned that she had full excuse
For her dejection. As a fretting ache
Is in comparison with pain let loose,
So is suspense ere we to woe awake.
To joy one could not lightly bid adieu
Who had of late but lived herself to please :
Guy had infected her in constant view
Of that career of selfishness and ease—

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

Ah ! evil hath contagion, for the spell
That streams from goodness flows from it as well.

And now she cried, ' O Death ! if he be dead,
Or if alive departed from my life—
If we, true lovers once, may never wed,
Be thou my husband, let me be thy wife.
But spare me wooing ! Steal thou not like him
Beneath the moonbeams, down the avenues,
Each balmy evening, to the forest dim,
Nor whisper claims no mortal could refuse.
Fire not my daily thoughts, my dreams at night :
Appoint one meeting ; I will keep the tryst ;
Hover not near, half hidden, half in sight.
At once I would be, and for ever, kissed.
I vow thee homage, and a faithful bride,
Will never cease to slumber at thy side.'

But soon she pleaded, as the sun reshone,
' O Life ! if thou hast kept him, let me live.
He could not cling to thee if I were gone.
Grant me till then what else thou hast to give.
Ere he embrace me send the purple days
That dawn on others happier in love ;
And silver nights wherein a dreamy maze
Shall circle us the while we fondly love !

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

Then wedded leave us on a golden floor,
An ocean pathway to the westward sun,
Wherein hand-shaded eyes from the far shore
May watch us lose ourselves, thy day full done.
What more? Ah! who can tell? I ask but this,
To leave us on that road to better bliss.'

She, thus soliloquizing, homeward turned ;
And 'mid the flowering meadows Death was mute,
As tho' he sulked, since now for Life she yearned,
Who trilled his answer thro' a blackbird's flute.
Before her skipped a startled hare, that fled,
Like her gay spirit now from lurking Death,
While lowing kine and bleating lambkins said
That Life was dear tho' Want employ the breath.
Then townward turning she reminded Paul
How she had kept her pledge to stay the time
He had required as due to her affairs,
And how she fretted 'mid the foreign clime,
And longed for brighter scenes and balmier airs.
Then bidding him adieu, it looked as tho'
The rain was there without the glistening bow.

A thrush upon a poplar hymned
The stormy sky, with head elate,
Well knowing that the clouds which dimmed
The blue would vanish soon or late.

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

The rain and wind were God's good gift ;
Tho' heaven were grey, and earth were sad,
The gale would lull, the vapours lift,
And rainbow hues bid all be glad.

A woman grovelled in her woe,
Nor let one note of music rise,
Saw naught but misery below,
And drew no comfort from the Skies.

Yet He who bade the tempest wild
Sweep o'er the bird had sent her tears ;
And soon a radiance round her smiled
To still the grief, and calm the fears.

But the blithe warbler had so shamed
By joyful music her complaint,
That I, who watched them both, exclaimed,
' The song-bird is the better saint !'

X.

Call to me, love, and my spirit shall hear !
Be it from mountain, or meadow, or deep ;
Never an accent but what will be clear.
Tell me but this—and no longer I weep.

Tell me from far that I am not forgot ;
Tender and true, thou dost think of me still—
Mourn for our parting, and pity my lot,
Long to be with me thy vow to fulfil.

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

Tell me that midnight owes less to the moon
Than thou to me amid sadness and strife;
Tell me that sunlight will vanish from noon
Ere thou forsake my meridian of life.

Tell me that never a planet above
Lit a dark truant as I shall guide thee
Back thro' the gloom by the light of the love
That from thy spirit first shone over me.

Call to me quickly ! I wither, and faint—
Breath of my being, blow soon, or I die !
Waft the one balm for my bitter complaint,
Love's certain cure for the tear and the sigh !

That was the song, but where was she
Who warbled it so plaintively
Ere sunset, in the vacant room
Which, golden then, now lay in gloom ?
The song was worthy of the bird,
They deemed who its rare music heard.
The cage was fair, a fitting home
For Beauty with no call to roam.
But some avowed, who said her gaze
Was far away, and knew her ways,
That as with open door a lark
Would seek the Blue, so in the dark
Of yestereve the bird had flown,
And left the chamber drear and lone.
How empty it appeared to Paul,
Who on the morrow chanced to call,

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

And finding the fair minstrel free,
Had echoed wildly, 'Where is she?'
He now remembered, yesterday
Was the set finish of her stay.
O'erpressed, he had forgot the last
Few words that had between them passed,
And pondering on what she said,
He felt that Thea now had fled,
Herself to track the truant swain,
Or else to cross the sea again.
But which? until she let him know,
'Twere more than that the vanished glow
Had left his outlook chill and tame,
Like fields that mourn the sunset flame :
'Twere that her cause, and self perchance,
Might suffer through her ignorance,
If her keen sense discovered Guy,
As the hen-bird instinctively
Tracks out a mate in vernal time,
Who earlier left the winter clime.
This song that lay beside her lyre
Betokened undiminished fire.
A sweeping glance, a moment's thought,
And Paul resolved she should be sought.
A questioning of all around
Soon hinted where she would be found.
One hour and he was on the way,
And Arba Court before him lay.

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

XI.

Laughing with thee as a landscape smiles
In the warm splendour of noonday bliss;
Tuneful and gay for enchanted miles,
Basking beneath the sun's burning bliss.
Light of my face! glory and grace
Gladden it only thro' thine embrace.

Dreaming of thee as the mountains rest,
Crowned with the pink of an after-glow
Left by the sunset, a bright bequest
Lingering long, yet foredoomed to go.
Fire of my dreams! gently there streams
Calm and delight from thy fading gleams.

Mourning for thee as the valleys weep,
Drenched with the dews of the twilight fled;
Chill to the charm of the stars that keep
Vigil, like tapers o'er rapture dead.
Flame that hath shone, sunken and gone!
Joy is but mocked by the lights that burn on.

Waiting for thee as the meadows stay
Misty and mute in the early gloom,
Till the warm spells of returning day
Waken the music and gild the bloom.
Orb of my sky! with thee on high
Dewdrops will vanish, and vapours fly.

Enough of Time had gone. How much who knew?
Not Guy or Ida, for no lovers count.

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

The days that slowly crept, or quickly flew,
But for one question, were of no account,
And only short or long by that one test.
To Love's pure honey hived within the breast
Had much been added, aught from it removed?
They reckoned this alone, the pair that newly
loved.

But time enough had passed to let them know
That Love's grand Ocean hath a twofold tide—
Sad ebbing follows on tumultuous flow—
And Ida, who had laughed at first, now sighed;
Her woman's insight soon discerned that he
Was hardly what she pictured him to be;
And Guy grew restless, for he felt too well
That while her heart was heaven, his now was
very hell.

Her's was a firmament of purity
Like the blue heights above, that none can probe;
But clouds will gather in the lower sky,
Born of the mists from our unwholesome globe.
Love was that lower heaven now, and earth,
Thro' Guy's depravity, had stained its worth;
For vapours from his heart, and vicious past,
Had taken phantom form, as in her sky they
massed.

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

The West upon a sultry afternoon
May bear cloud cities, battles, demon-forms,
All tipped with glory that must vanish soon,
And oft the sun will set 'mid tearful storms.
Her heaven was banked by cloud-shapes even so,
With golden splendour edged from Love's warm
glow,
But, ah! it could not be for long; she felt
The sunset was at hand, the glory soon must melt.

That Guy was fickle she already knew,
And evil rumours now had reached her ears,
Which, tho' he had pronounced them all untrue,
Awakened doubt, and started bitter tears.
His wrong would soon have yielded to her right
Had he but let her lift it to the light,
He happy in the loyalty and troth
Of one who held enough of goodness for them both.

For there are hearts of a celestial bent,
Who, like the loadstone pointing to the pole,
Possess a power to be the instrument
Of turning northwards an else erring soul.
Yet Guy, tho' she was perfect in his eyes,
Had little in him she could magnetize
A saintly soul, alas! can be no law
To one who will not from a foul resolve withdraw.

THE CLOCK OF ARBA.

Yet for herself, the heavenward bent was like
That restless longing the North Pole to win,
Which makes the man whom it hath seized dislike
Ignoble calm, as she would start from sin.
For he would, rather than remain at ease,
Perish like Franklin amid Arctic seas ;
And a magnetic current made her turn
To virtue's lofty snow, and vice's languor spurn.

He who would wed a woman ought to spread
The open book before her of his Past ;
Yet this would Guy not do, tho' he had read
Her tale of innocence from first to last.
He her first love, she had but to confess
That many had admired her more or less,
And one had courted her who bore the name
Of Norman, and had laid before her wealth and fame.

A former friend, a skilful engineer
Who came to Arba Clock from time to time,
The only craftsman who could interfere
With its antique machinery and chime—
He, a rejected suitor, met her now
As one who loved no more, with placid brow.
Guy, told of this, and knowing he was there,
Felt he might fitly urge anew his fervent prayer.

' Love, let us marry now ; be hard no more !
Have not I made full proof of loyalty ?

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

Recall thy simile, and let the shore
Own she is not forsaken of the sea.
No ebbing from the brimful tide of love
Shalt thou bemoan, I swear by Heaven above!
Be more than human, show thyself Divine,
Hear my petition, shed thy grace, and make me thine!

For summer, fleeing fast, will leave no rose
To deck the marriage bower if we delay;
And Norman, now at hand, to-morrow goes,
And I would order the new chime to-day.
Love, disappoint me not, for many a bell
Should now be cast all others to excel!
This peal hath been for long my thoughtful care,
And in my fond concern I now would have thee share.'

And Ida, who had long ago resolved
To keep her troth to him, come woe or weal,
And let the riddle of his Past be solved,
As Time or Chance its darkness should reveal,
Passed him her word that they might now be wed,
Tho' she consented with a nameless dread,
Which, while she spoke, the bell appeared to voice
In strange, uncanny tone, as if to mourn her choice.

Swift to the tower they hurried, and when there
Were told by Norman the untimely peal
Was but the proving of a slight repair.
Let them now enter, and he would reveal

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

The secret of the strange machinery,
A chamber, too, whereof he kept the key.
Guy, walking on, then opened to his view
Their secret, and received congratulations due.

And yet a darkness clouded Norman's eye,
To creep across his face and vanish soon,
As a strange thunder-cloud steals o'er the sky,
To melt in balmy breath and glow of noon.
Calm as before—nay, almost with the smile
Few ever found on him, he listened while
They bade him fix a chime without delay,
In a far foundry cast, ere the auspicious day.

Let me portray him—taciturn and cold,
A dark enigma to the neighbourhood;
A man much talked of both by young and old,
Whom some believed was bad, and others good;
A man of steel without the magnet's spell
O'er iron natures; half an infidel,
And all a sceptic, in whose subtle mind
Faith, hope—I say not love—but scanty soil could
find.

Would ye hinder two whose story
Hath begun Above from plighting,
Ye must keep the trees from waving
Each to other in Spring-glory,

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

And the thrushes from uniting,
Hotly chased from bough to bough.
Ripples ye must stop from laving
Golden sands, and winds from raving
Round the rocks to keep their vow.
Ye must bar the moths from bliss,
And forbid the ants to kiss,
Part the lightning from the thunder,
Empty hearts of love and wonder.

Even then your magic could not
Sever two whom Heaven would mingle.
Be they strange as oil to water—
Such as human judgment would not
Marry, yet in grove or dingle
They will meet and intertwine.
Once ye loved a maid and sought her,
Bless the son, nor curse the daughter
Who for one another pine,
When in spite of you they wed,
By a guiding planet led !
The Omnipotent hath done it,
Set a goal, and they have won it.

XII.

Flowers of the field that are blooming so gladly !
Birds of the grove in your musical strife !
Have ye no care for the clouds that so sadly
Darken the sun that hath gilded my life ?

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

Hold your sweet perfume, nor merrily glisten,
Beautiful blossoms, one moment, I pray !
Cease your fond carol, gay warblers, and listen
While I recount what hath grieved me to-day !

One whose dear love to my view was as golden
As the bright orb ye are worshipping now,
Circles my heart with a chain that hath holden
Others to him and is holding one now.

Well might ye glory, and warble your rapture,
Spend the rare perfume, and squander the song,
If thro' your magic my heart could recapture
Aught of her due, or be quit of her wrong.

But the delight ye so gaily are telling
Starts the vain tears that were better unshed ;
Chime not your joy-bells while Fortune is knelling
Hope that hath lingered o'er loyalty dead.

Smile, happy flowers, when your laughter can bring me
Back the fond love that so lightly hath flown !
Pipe, tuneful birds, at your will when ye sing me
News of his truth who hath left me alone !

So sang the heart, if not the tongue,
Of Thea, as she roved among
The fields which, all to her unknown,
Might one day be her very own.
Her journey o'er, tho' needing food,
She sought for Guy, and solitude,
To find the latter first in glades
Untrodden, and neglected shades.

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

It was a forest wild and lone
By Flora's fairest wealth o'ergrown,
One consecrate to sylvan loves,
Sweet merles, gay thrushes, dreamy doves :
Where emerald dells and flowery glens
Played hide-and-seek with caves and dens ;
And golden rays and heavenly blues
Coquetted with green avenues.
A grove it was far too divine
For mingled hearts to disentwine—
Too resonant with Love's delight
For linkèd hands to disunite—
A paradise too full of bliss
For lips late married by a kiss,
In passionate yet vain appeal,
Or cold disfavour to unseal :
Yet one who chanced to lurk there now
Should shortly overhear the vow
Passed in that other forest dim
Repudiated now by him,
Tho' pleaded tearfully by her—
By him whose lips were dropping myrrh
And honey sweeter than the flowers,
Thro' those incomparable hours,
When, 'mid the paling sunset fire,
He wooed his fickle heart's desire—
By her who then, with face upturned,
The primer of true love had learned.

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

For first the watcher would have seen
Lorn Thea in an arbour green,
Whereto some folk who knew his way
Had told her Guy would often stray
With a fair maiden, whom they said
'Twas rumoured he would shortly wed.
'Nay, be the lady half divine,'
Poor Thea pondered, 'he is mine—
Mine, for he whispered once that I
Was faultless, pure, divinity ;
Mine from the hour he swore that none
Could match my loveliness—not one ;
Mine from the moment that a kiss
Taught me how vain was other bliss.
If not his joy, why then my tears
Shall seal him mine when he appears.
Will not yon lingering sunset-glow
Recall that crimson long ago ?
With birds so tuneful can he fail
To think of one sweet nightingale ?
And then the watcher would have known
That Thea was no more alone ;
For Guy, tho' not with Ida now,
Had brushed thro' many a screening bough,
And started, like the guilty one
He was, to find his scheme outdone.
Full faced by his poor dupe, he first
Dissembled, and denied the worst—

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

That any bride would hail him groom—
And bore himself as one on whom
She had small claim—one who had strayed
In fancy from too many a maid,
For any to be so aggrieved,
Who of his favour was bereaved.
She owed to him the being free
From early bonds and tyranny ;
The dwelling in a happy home,
From whence she need not want to roam.
Too lightly had he gone perhaps,
And let too long a time elapse
Ere writing, but would now atone
For all if he were let alone :
A yearly balm she should receive,
A golden balm, and cease to grieve.
What?—Here the one behind the green
Who spied would certainly have seen
Her who had passionately wept
Throughout, or bitter silence kept,
Start back, and draw in outraged pride
A hidden knife, wherewith she tried
To pierce the heart that for him beat
No more, and perish at his feet.
And one who then beheld him dash
The blade aside, and saw it flash,
And fled in timely terror lest
The peering should be manifest,

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

Might well have thought that Thea now
Had thus avenged the broken vow,
And slain the perjurer who told
Her to be comforted by gold.
But Guy here finishing the strife
By wresting from her hand the knife,
They vanished from the arbour, each
Receding from the other's reach.
Ah me! that mortals thus could rove
From bowers that might have nurtured love,
And been the starting-point where sin
Should die, and holiness begin.
The early pair who Eden left
Of mutual love were not bereft ;
Nay, a bethorned, bethistled Earth
Would tutor them to its true worth,
And, erring as they had, the sense
Of guilt might gender penitence ;
But Thea from her Eden sped,
A heart all passionless and dead ;
And Guy strode on, a spirit past
The bourne of earthly hope at last—
And lo! to listening ears the knell
Of Time from Arba's neighbouring bell.

Had I but known, your whispered words,
Whose music mocked the loveliest bird's,
Would faint like echoes on the wind,
To leave no truth or hope behind,

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

Would I have treasured every tone ?
Had I but known—had I but known.

Had you foreseen that they would be
Food, medicine, and wealth to me,
Perchance what flamed me as the red
Of sundown would have been unsaid ;
Still gay as noon I might have been
Had you foreseen—had you foreseen.

Had we but guessed the little while
You were to beam, and I to smile—
That, turning as the changeful moon,
Your splendour would forsake me soon,
We might have deemed quick parting best,
Had we but guessed—had we but guessed.

Had we been told there would be now
Between us but a broken vow,
A love that could not live again,
To me so dead, to you so vain,
Would I have burned, and you grown cold ?
Had we been told—had we been told.

XIII.

The wingèd hosts that haunt decay
Look strangely ill at ease ;
The birds have hushed the tuneful lay,
And mope amid the trees.

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

The moths upon the lilies' lips
Drowse thro' the sunny beams' eclipse,
Or calmly float like summer ships
Responsive to no breeze.

What mean the waiting woodland things,
This morn so fresh and fair?
No eagle on her quarry springs;
Hawks hover in mid air.
Wild creatures prowl upon the plain,
Or haunt the forest, field and lane,
And hanker for some prey in vain;
But why? and what? and where?

Ye who would know, the answer seek
In Nature's open book!
The carrion crows with hungry beak,
The kites with baffled look,
All blab the horrors of a tale
Told by wild echoes on the gale,
And the deep crimson of a trail
Up to a bloody brook.

Where is the body? whose the hand
That brought about the death?
Can none the echoes understand
That keep the dying breath?

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

Who will interpret—who divine
The hidden sense of many a sign?
Tho' in one story all combine,
Who knows what any saith?

A rustic roaming off the road
Chanced on the ruddy track,
And open-eyed a moment stood,
To turn and hurry back.
And now a horror-stricken throng
Hath ranged the scene of mortal wrong;
They drag the brook, and yet for long
All trace or clue they lack.

Are birds so dull, and brutes so dumb
As we who vaunt our sense?
From sin doth our unwisdom come,
Their lore from innocence?
Two crows tell more than that vain host
About the victim and his ghost;
A dog can prove the death, and boast
Of finding evidence.

His bark hath brought them to a place
Sequestered and remote,
Where they have lit on many a trace
Of hidden crime—a coat,

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

A handkerchief, a curious knife,
Gore-sprinkled from a deadly strife,
That seemed a conflict for dear life
Most clearly to denote.

Where is the body? Ask the sun,
That glowed in wrath last night ;
The moon, faint till the deed was done ;
The stars who shrank from sight ;
The tearful sky—or ask the things
That prowl or hover on dull wings!
None, none will tell you, till Time brings
The mystery to light.

XIV.

Troubled or weary one,
Quit the vain throng !
Look how the watching sun
Burns for thy wrong !
Mortals but mind their own ;
He from his azure throne
To thee and thine alone
Seems to belong.

Every gay bloom of earth,
Each bending tree,
That else would wave in mirth,
Nods sympathy !

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

Let the world laugh or rave,
With the sad ocean-wave
Yearning to soothe and save
Thee, only thee !

In the sweet floral eyes
Turned to thy smart,
And the low-murmuring flies
That round thee dart ;
In the soft waterfall,
And the field warblings all,
Hear the kind mother call,
' Rest on my heart !'

Oh, there hath been a hue-and-cry
Full many an hour for missing Guy !
Fair Ida, now of him bereft,
Sits tearful, telling how he left
Her presence to inspect the chime
Last evening, about sunset-time ;
For he was told they then would lift
The bells now cast, his wedding-gift.
There had he lingered long, and talked
With Norman and his men, and walked
Thence forestward ; but none had seen
Him since, or known where he had been.
And haunts and houses where he might
Have stayed were visited last night ;
And his retainers far and wide
Are ranging o'er the countryside—

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

When, lo! they happen on the throng
Now spellbound by that scene of wrong :
And, ah ! the grief to recognise
The blood-besprinkled coat as Guy's ;
And faithful tears are flowing fast
From many an eye that saw him last
In the full heyday of his strength ;
While lips that vaunted oft the length
Of their attachment to the clan
Now eulogized the murdered man.
For haply some had cause to bless
That life so marred by viciousness :
And loyal servitude is blind,
And to a bearing brave and kind
Much is forgiven, while the rest
Is viewed and reckoned at its best.
But now, who did the murder ? Time
Throws gradual light upon the crime.
The letter Paul so lately wrote
Is soon discovered in the coat.
This read, a double motive stands
Revealed for death at Thea's hands—
Namely, her vengeance for the act
Therein related, and the fact
There told, that, failing issue male,
She came the next in the entail.
And, horror ! on the handkerchief
Her name appears—while, greater grief !

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

The knife wherewith the deed was done
Is recognised as sold to one
So like her, by a cutler near,
That the dark inference is clear ;
And, worst of all, the arbour scene
Of yestereve, it seems, had been
Watched by a woman, who now came
To tell, tho' owning it with shame,
That curiosity had bid
Her stay on, while completely hid ;
Tho' she had meant, ere Guy appeared,
To pass along. She plainly heard
The wild appeal and angry strife,
And swore the girl had used the knife
E'en then upon the hapless Guy,
Who slunk away, perchance to die.
She also left, no doubt to round
Upon him where the blade was found.

XV.

O Arba hostel is the haunt of mirth
On market-mornings, a right merry place !
No gayer concourse could ye find on earth
Of yeomen and their wives, a sturdy race.
The orchards might ye search, and many a face

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

Would shame the ruddy apple and ripe pear ;
And blushing girls, and lads of power and grace,
At noonday mealtime will be gathered there,
And vainly would ye seek for sorrow anywhere.

Now, might ye look in vain for aught beside,
Altho' the day is bright as any other.
What joy the rosy faces have, they hide ;
The old appear as if they mourned a brother :
The young, perchance a father or a mother.
They eat and drink (what melancholy stops
E'en funeral fare?) yet grief that none can smother
Hath brought to many a wandering eye sad drops
While resting on a bill which the huge mantel tops—

A bill that puts a price upon the head
Of Guy's foul murderer, and pictures out
In words the girl who last was with the dead,
By name, as tho' 'twere she beyond a doubt ;
When lo ! a stranger enters, and throughout
The inn all start and hasten to him soon ;
For, ordering food, he turns himself about,
And glancing round, begins to hum a tune,
Eye the placard, turn pale, and sink into a swoon.

Balm is at hand, and slowly he revives
To reckon and depart, but not before
One set to watch and follow him arrives ;
Because mine host would know what name he bore,

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

And in the pocket of the coat he wore
Found papers proving him to be the Paul
Who wrote to Guy, and such a look was o'er
His fearful face ere he began to fall,
That to insure an eye on him were best for all—

An eye to fix him, like the sleepless Look
Which watches men in mercy from the Sky ;
His gaze and catalogue Who undertook
To save, and so regards them from on high.
But ah ! for no design of love that eye
From now should follow the sad wanderer,
And track his footsteps, and his deeds espy,
But that a guardianship too close to err
Should keep of every act a faithful register.

For Paul had followed the sweet warbler long
With but the hope of her to gild the way ;
Faced by that news, what wonder that her song
Died on his lips, and that awhile he lay
Bereft of spirit, and then fled away,
Wild for his murdered friend, nor that alone ;
Resolved to find his dear without delay,
Sure of her innocence, as of his own :
'Forlorn, uncaptured bird,' he cried, 'where hast
thou flown ?

And he who wronged thee, whither hath he fled ?
Is he in weal or woe ?' Ah ! who so bold

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

As to feel aught but hopeful for the dead?
And yet, and yet, the earthly tale now told—
Was it not one of evil manifold,
A wicked waste of talents, time, and gold?
And weak and weary, Paul shed bitter tears
As memory gilded their dear love of old,
And the wrecked promise of the happy years,
Till sorrow for the past paled before present fears.

Thea, so guiltless of his blood, yet cursed
By all, where was she? Be the fatal grove
The starting-point for his pursuit at first.
He hurried to the arbour where they strove,
And then, Heaven help her! thro' the boughs that
wove
A leafy curtain he beholds the maid,
Back in that tender haunt, and while they rove
For miles to capture her, quite undismayed,
Unconscious of his end who had her trust betrayed.

And O her bitter tears and vain despair
When, a quick greeting o'er, the truth was known!
Yet emptily she craved to linger there,
And face the throng that hunted her, alone.
Her safety was Paul's single care; his own,
Were it endangered, gave him no concern.
Much had he braved for her since she had flown.

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

O'er her he yearned, nor could he cease to yearn ;
Here let him stay till those who sought her should
return !

Nor long they waited, for the watching eye
Had marked their meeting, and the Law's grim band
Soon captured her as murderess of Guy,
And him who, as he held her by the hand,
At least appeared to be accessory.
Thus would he prove himself her true ally,
Well knowing how he had it in his power
To clear himself from all complicity
In the dark crime, and save her in the hour
Of trial with his skill, and lore, and legal dower.

And that in truth soon seemed the wiser plan ;
For they, first prisoned in a separate cell,
She, a suspected woman, he a man,
Could hold no intercourse, nor hear or tell
What might impair her cause, or serve it well.
So Paul soon urged the right to show that he
Was wholly alien from the bloody spell ;
And proving it, the Law pronounced him free,
Nor disallowed his claim her advocate to be.

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

XVI.

Yea, do
Your very best,
Yet will you never pass
Beyond the barrier of Fate !
He who doth shift the wind and turn the wave,
Who to the sun and star an orbit gave,
Hath set a bound, and left no gate.
Here tearfully, alas !
Have I to rest,
And you.

Yet strive !
For the wind blows
~~Ere~~ changing, and the wave
Foams furiously to the bound ;
And few can tell that they have reached the bar.
But plainly there, be like the sun and star
Serene and shining in their round,
Until His time to save,
Or interpose,
Arrive.

Then trying first to track the body home
To its last resting-place, Paul questioned hill
And vale, and moor, and marsh, nor ceased to roam
Near and afar, and drag each lake and rill ;
But ah ! how emptily for all his skill ;
A mystery it yet remained like those
In Nature's catalogue that baffle till

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

The hour when genius startles her repose,
And makes a magic spell her hidden things disclose.

And next he questioned Ida, begging her,
Nor quite in vain, throw off her brooding grief,
And face the fact ; that Justice might not err.
Completely innocent, to his relief,
She reckoned Thea, sharing his belief.
For Truth's dear sake, then, would she tell him this—
Were any envious that Guy was chief
In her affections? Say, did she dismiss
Another ere his love had opened out new bliss?

And Ida started as the look that crept
O'er Norman's countenance that day of days
Returned to her, and passionately wept.
A look it was of more than sad amaze ;
But was it evil? was it quite the gaze
Of one who even envied Guy his charm?
Or rather his who mentally surveys
A prospect seeming bright, with vague alarm?
She could not fairly think that it foreboded harm.

Yet nothing should be hidden now ; and all
The way in which he courted her of old,
Nay, all she knew, was opened out to Paul,
Who read strange meaning in the tale she told,
And would an interview with him now hold.
So to the tower they hurried while a knell
In memory of murdered Guy was tolled.

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

Ah! were they drawn there, too, by some weird spell
Foreboding what should front them shortly?
Who can tell?

But Norman, busy with the work above,
Sent word to bid them wait a while below ;
When Ida, musing o'er her vanished love,
Pleaded for solitude to nurse her woe,
And Paul paced up and down the portico,
Feeling that they the truest comfort win
Who let their bitter tears unhindered flow,
Till, summoned back by her, the two begin
To roam the corridor and passages within.

The secret chamber had a door unlocked,
And Ida, peering in, beheld the face
Which filled her dreams, so ghastly pale, that shocked
And faint, she screamed, and but for Paul's embrace
Had fallen ere he could their steps retrace :
For there 'mid the machinery was Guy—
A corpse so upright and in such a place
That it appeared as if he meant to try
To make men think he thus by his own hand
would die.

A passer-by had sounded an alarm
At Ida's scream, and ere she could revive,
The band whose duty was to hinder harm,
And Norman too, upon the scene arrive.

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

So strange his look, so clearly did he strive
To shew it accident or suicide
(For even so, he could not but connive,
They thought, at the dark deed), that they decide
To keep him till they prove how the dead man
 had died.

Minute research revealed that he had swooned,
And died ere chambered here, from the effect,
It seemed, of a not self-inflicted wound
Closed cunningly, nor easy to detect.
So they who sit in scrutiny elect
That Norman be required to clear his name,
As one whom from his function all suspect.
However blameless be his former fame,
Let him with Thea now the charge of crime
 disclaim.

XVII.

When they malign the fair
Whom thou dost favour,
Who will thine honour share
If thou but crave her?
Shall the sun brightly sink
To the blue ocean's brink
Ere ye in Love's own link
Unite, to save her?

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

Rumour's malignant breath
 Lightly may fan thee ;
Let not a word it saith
 Move or unman thee.
Bid the world hear thee first
Ere she be blest or cursed ;
Boldly to bear the worst,
 Stay where all scan thee !

When the vile tongues arraign
 Her thou art shielding,
Though the defence be vain
 That thou art wielding,
Many may disallow
All they affirm, if thou,
True to thy loving vow,
 Face them unyielding.

Then to the glowing meed
 Of thy devotion
Spread fiery wings, and speed
 Warm with emotion !
Love, the enchanted West,
Thou a red sun to rest
On a pure swelling breast
 Gentler than ocean.

Paul, putting other cares aside,
On this spent all his energy ;
And hoping better to provide
Fit witnesses, he crossed the sea.

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

He could but prove a spotless name,
Nor that, but from her home of yore ;
So to her youthful friends he came
To catechise them, and explore.
How vividly the ancient town,
The terraced walk and parapet,
Where citizens paced up and down,
Recalled the morning that they met !
He, just arrived as now, and Guy
In the perfection of young health
And merriment, with by-and-bye
The certainty of pomp and wealth ;
And now, and now—ah ! Paul had been
A faithless friend had he not shed
A troubled tear as on this scene,
He gazed, and conjured up the dead—
Had he not consecrated one
Brief hour to tender memories,
Where on that day the fiery sun
Bathed golden youth 'neath summer skies.
But ah ! we hold not life in fee,
Nor are we tenants in mortmāin ;
And sighs are profitless as glee,
And all but energy is vain.
We may not suffer the dead hand
To fetter our activity,
Or drag us back into the land
Of useless dream and reverie.

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

The day of Trial for the crime
Was far too near for Paul to weep.
Capricious Change and certain Time
Were wide awake ; was he to sleep ?
And, starting up, he thundered ' Nay !
So fiercely that the wild wood things
That eyed his trouble fled away
On hasty feet or hurried wings.
His toil and scrutiny should lack
No effort, he avowed, henceforth.
Adventurous, on many a track
Untrodden yet would he fare forth.
Be it the clue he most desired
Was undiscovered anywhere,
That human bloodhounds were required
To scent the culprit to his lair,
He could collect undoubted proof
Of nature, conduct, character,
From all who lived beneath a roof
That in the Past had sheltered her.
As critics turn a volume's page
Transmitted to them for review,
The chapter of her every age
Should open itself out to view.
Ah ! when the Future, now unknown,
Awaiting thee is all unsealed,
And when before the Great White Throne
A life's behaviour is revealed—

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

When thought and word and action throng
Before the Judge for recompense,
May He discern as little wrong,
As few that can be called offence !
Paul felt as he pursued the search
Like one who trod a field of snow—
Whose footprints left the only smirch
Of earth while wandering to and fro,
Save for one corner where a drift
Hath blown the whiteness round the gate
Away to leave a little rift
In what were else inviolate ;
So Thea's youth and maidenhood
Her friends (she had no enemies)
Declared had been discreet and good,
As they would gladly certify.
' A faultless pupil, free from shame ;
Of all, the wisest and the best
Was she, until the reptile came
And stole the fledgling from the nest.'
So said the grave Superior,
Who at the mention of it wept.
For her, tho' she might well abhor
The tempter, she but kindness kept.
Yes, that was the dark corner in
The snowy path of Thea's life
Around the gate ; her only sin
Was opening that to be his wife.

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

‘ But, ah ! how far will all avail ? ’
Paul mused, the while he journeyed back—
‘ No more than that if they should fail
To prove her criminal, the lack
Of proof may well with this combine
To clear her in the eyes of all.
Oh, could I now but make her mine,
While fettered in this fearful thrall !
I’d barter everything beside
To hear a whisper of her breath
Consenting to become my bride,
And let me share her life or death.
But something tells me I should err
In pleading for her favour now.
Too well I know her character
To hope that she would hear my vow.
What, what will happen ? Can a Power
Have set her in the common sky,
That we mere mortals for an hour
Should gaze upon her ere she die ?
It cannot be—and yet, and yet,
God made not only stars to light
Our gloom, and in our hearts beget
Sweet comfort thro’ the livelong night :
He made the meteors that leave
A shining track, and swift dissolve
To mock the hearts that vainly grieve
O’er mysteries they may not solve.

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

If she be one—which He forfend !—
My firmament will never know
A course more silvery, an end
That languishes in lovelier show.
But, ah ! the darkness when it dies—
That bright bequest ! I could not bear
The upward gaze with empty eyes ;
Yet, courage ! let me not despair.

XVIII.

‘ Songs in the night ’ Thou wilt give to the darkened,
Harmony then for the heart to recall,
Who ’mid the sunset of joy may have hearkened
To the sweet echoes of eve’s madrigal—

Melody breaking the silence of midnight,
Voicing one love, loyal, lasting and pure,
Rare as the tones that trill on thro’ the hid light
Of the clear silver that shadows obscure—

Music of manifold hope at the gleaming
Of the new dawn ere the vapours have furled ;
Like the still warblers that wake from their dreaming
With the first ray that hath gilded the world.

Giver of songs, if they fail me at even,
Or ’mid the dawn, I could bear it ; but oh
Leave the one cheer of dark earth and veiled heaven !
Grant me the nightingale-notes in my woe !

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

The day of Trial dawned, and never yet
Was such a gathering in Arba seen.
Fit was the weather—wintry, grey and wet,
As tho' wild Nature mourned o'er a demesne
Without a monarch, or, it may have been,
Wept with fair innocence; but from afar
And near, of high and low a throng immense
Crowded the town, and in particular
The court, when the accused was marshalled to
the bar.

The Trial opened, first for Norman spake
The subtlest lawyer of the land, who (tho'
Against him were the best who undertake
Crown causes, and to Truth the duty owe
Of urging all the facts that they can shew)
Revealed how feeble were the proofs of guilt;
Too weak for the accused to undergo
The penalty for blood that had been spilt,
Which claimed that crime be proved up to the
very hilt.

Wherein the Judge concurred, and so his charge
Required the Jury forthwith to acquit
That prisoner, who then was set at large.
He had not feared, and so 'twere now unfit
To joy as one who could the Law outwit.
The throng, however, when he was set free
Held that he had but won the benefit

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

Of slender proof—nor showed the sympathy
Due to the innocence which all can plainly see.

Then came the evidence direct and strong
Against poor Thea, who maintained her ground
Immovable amid the surging wrong.
No lighthouse which relentless waves surround,
No hunted thing that many a savage hound
Hath brought to bay, could stand more lone and lorn:
Yet never did a gesture, look, or sound,
Of fear escape her, nor a glance of scorn,
When aught that favoured her was met and over-
borne.

And some affirmed that, called upon to plead,
As she replied 'Not guilty' a divine
Aurora, such as in the hour of need
Steeped early martyrs, round her seemed to shine
As tho' of injured innocence the sign.
Yet that were surely shed o'er them alone
Who yield their being up of set design;
Who freely give for other lives their own,
Or perish rather than that Truth be overthrown.

Tho' in defence the best was done for her
By Paul's impassioned zeal, and legal lore,
Who laid due stress on her pure character,
And friendlessness upon a foreign shore,

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

Naught counteracted what that woman swore,
And the condemning knife and handkerchief.
Whereof (tho' now besprinkled with his gore)
Guy, in their early love, had been the thief ;
These were but parried by Paul's personal belief—

His unsupported word that she knew naught
About her kinship and inheritance.
Then certain of the witnesses he brought
From her far home admitted that by chance
They once had overheard the utterance
That she could kill a traitor to her trust.
Apparently, from many a circumstance,
Another aided her, for some man must
Have helped to carry Guy after the mortal thrust.

And it was warmly urged by the defence
That she be unconvicted till they got
Full certainty of this by evidence.
She was the victim of some evil plot—
The charge had not been proven, with one knot
Unravelled—so 'twas pleaded ; but they held
That since no doubt of Thea's part and lot
In the foul crime remained to be dispelled,
The Right would suffer if a verdict were withheld.

And so they found her guilty, nor with hope
Of mercy, for such foul intent was shown.
Ah me! with Circumstance we vainly cope.
With Chance against us, we are overthrown.

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

Yet courage, Thea! Thou art not alone.
He is beside thee 'Who the world doth sway,
Who once without a murmur or a moan
Heard His white Life and Honour sworn away—
Who died for others' weal—by thee He stands to-day!

There was a scene that none will e'er forget
In Arba when that verdict was returned—
When Paul, who only thought of Thea, let
The passion find quick utterance that burned
Within him and for fierce expression yearned,
And with wild vehemence the Court denounced,
Who bore with him now they the cause discerned—
When she, the moment they her doom announced,
With perfect dignity her innocence pronounced.

There were not wanting those who wildly wept
For the slain lord, yet held her guiltless quite,
And deemed that one had to the chamber crept,
Who, stabbing first, had borne him out of sight.
They thought the verdict violated Right.
Some held her impotent for such a deed ;
Some doubted it the work of one so bright
And saintly-looking ; yet they all agreed
That she, a criminal, could not for mercy plead.

Do many spare a thought for one whose doom
Is sealed, when hurried from the living throng
Down to the cell of solitary gloom?
The court soon empties, and the crowd along

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

Life's highway blend in converse, oft in song ;
For him no more the steps of liberty ;
One daily-nearing walk to purge the wrong,
Till when, the bondage of dull misery.
If that be Thea's fate, spare her your sympathy!

XIX.

All liberated things crave solitude—
Warblers uncaged, mice that escape the trap ;
And oft I marvel at the promptitude
Wherewith a spidery victim of mishap
Speeds from the danger to repair his web.
We men return, from fettering pain uprisen,
To the old toil ere health was on the ebb.
What wonder then that Norman, free from prison,
Shunning the lukewarm crowd, resought the Tower,
There to employ new Liberty's prime hour?

No wonder, if it had not been that there
The ghastly spectacle had been on view ;
And yet in spite of it an urgent care
To the involved machinery was due.
The horrible entanglement had wrought
No mischief, and the whole was in full work ;
But then—ah, then ! whoever set at naught
The phantom fears and memories that lurk

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

Round scenes of death or murder? even he
Left the drear haunt—and hear his reverie!

‘Ay, after all there is a God, I think.
How strange that I who held there to be none,
Fresh from injustice, and Death’s very brink,
Should now feel sure, and own that there is one!
The victim, and the favourite, of Chance,
I disbelieve no more in Providence;
And fain with newly-opened eyes would glance
Beyond the curtain of concealing Sense,
But that the dazzling Purity behind
Would strike me, guilty and presumptuous, blind.

‘I said, “The Universe is a machine;
Sun, moon and star revolve in ordered round,
Immutable as is the course terrene,
Wherein no variation hath been found.
Winds range their circuit, and tides flow and ebb,
Obedient ever to perpetual laws;
Grim Destiny doth weave the human web;
Mercy is not; effect will follow cause:
Do this or that, the consequence is sure.”
So thought I once—I think it now no more.

‘This at the least I own—tho’ orbs be true,
And winds and tides change never, there is One
Who, with the set machinery in view,
And the sure consequence of what is done,

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

Holds all within the "hollow of His Hand,"
And makes them servants to a righteous Will,
In some high way we cannot understand,
Tho' seemingly they keep their courses still—
One Just, tho' Guilt may mock him for awhile,
And Innocence appear to lack His smile.

'Methinks the world of men is a machine
Planned by a Master-mind, Who places each ;
And if one miss his work will intervene,
Take him, and bid another fill the breach,
For a wrong pivot must not stop the wheel ;
Yet will it have to yield its due elsewhere,
More fitly placed ; as thy long empty zeal,
O hapless Guy (God save thee from despair,
If thy new sphere be darkness, and not day),
Will now find ample vent, and fuller play!

'And can it be that any human soul
Is a machine? for Love, I thought, would give
So glorious an impulse to the whole
That my dead heart would welcome it, and live :
Yet now with Guy no more, and Ida free,
I feel no movement, no upleaping fire,
No longing even her fair face to see.
Once all impassioned, now I lack desire,
What boots the open way without the will?
Could she be further with Guy living still?

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

'The open way? Ah, no! too fast I talk ;
All, all is open, but had I the will,
I over it were impotent to walk ;
Pathless and deep, it would but mock my skill.
Baffled and lonely from the hopeless ridge
I could but worship her with wistful glance,
Till the twin Engineers should throw a bridge
Across the gulf, sure Time and doubtful Chance.
Nay, Ida! better bury love with Guy,
And leave me *now* to harden, *then* to sigh.'

XX.

Music without me wakes
Echoes to-day,
From every wave that breaks
On the blue bay,
From grove and garden ground,
Mountain and vale,
Lovely while they resound,
Sad when they fail.

Music within me knells
Hope that hath fled.
Joy rings but muffled bells
For passion dead.
Memory but records
Dear vanished days ;
O'er the heart's tender chords
Lightly she strays.

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

Music around me bids
Trouble depart,
Rallies the tearful lids,
Lifts the low heart.
Accents from tuneful lips
Bid me be bright ;
For every dark eclipse
Issues in light.

Music from o'er me comes
Down to my soul ;
Chimes with the rest, and sums
All in one whole.
Snatches from song Above
Warble me this :
' Here is unmingled Love,
There is pure Bliss !'

And Ida, what of her? A month had passed
Since that wild scream that heralded her swoon,
And the grim sight whereat Paul stood aghast.
And what of Ida thro' that weary moon?
Well, one had borne her home, and there she lay,
A lonely, sunless flower, whose drooping face
Shrinks from the rigour of a storm in May.
Soon she revived, but only to retrace
The broken intercourse, the vanished joy—
Her single care was this, her sole employ.
She talked, but merely of the tender Past,
Love's golden glow before the dark eclipse :

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

No murmur that it could not longer last,
No empty yearning, ever left her lips.
She walked wherever they were wont to rove
(Save where a colloquy was closed in strife) :
The wild sea-shore, green lane, and forest-grove,
The hall where she had vowed to be his wife—
That banquet-hall where she had fed on sighs,
And whispered hopes, and gleams from hungry eyes.

And thither she had wandered one dark eve ;
'Twas at the gloaming hour, the halcyon time
When 'mid the dance he asked her mother's leave,
Who said the music of their lives might chime.
And while sad memory unlocked its store,
A something loomed upon her where she sat
(I tell you what was told me—nothing more),
Some awful thing which *we* had shuddered at ;
And even she, too pure for craven fears,
Grew pale before it 'mid the blinding tears.

A phantom form drew near her thro' the mist,
A form whose portraiture no pen could paint.
Ah, well for Ida, called upon to list
To its weird tones, that she was such a saint ;
Else had she quaked like Eliphaz, or died ;
But she kept calm, the calmer that she felt
One there of whom she might have been the bride—
The calmer, too, as she began to melt

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

On thinking of his agonies in death ;
And this was told her with unearthly breath,
'Behold, but ask me naught ! Thou art the one
To mitigate my woe—to help me first
Undo what of my past can be undone ;
And then perform that work which I am curst
Until I do. My mission in the world,
All unperformed, is now my penal task.
Men thro' my toil must feel the worth of Time.
Of thee alone am I allowed to ask
The boon that thou wilt bid them ring the chime.
Delay not !' and though she with quivering face
Would hinder him, he vanished into space.

'Twas but a dream, you say, and she had slept ?
I know but this, that now she was awake !
Another woman quite, no more she wept,
Fraught with a ministry for his dear sake.
With new-born energy she lightly sped
Alone to Norman, whom she had not seen
Since Guy had told him they were to be wed.
If he in truth had killed him, there had been
No stranger suit since Joab's, when he won
His way with David, weeping for his son.

Yet Ida, fraught with but one care, repealed
An order that the chime was to be stopped—
The bells that very night should first be pealed ;
And when a few sad final tears were dropped,

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

A prayer put up to Heaven that Right be done,
And many for the girl who, innocent,
Was doomed to suffer ere the morrow's sun
Had risen high, her homeward steps she bent,
And from the beach whereon she sat so free
And blithe that morn came this soliloquy :

XXI.

' O happy day ! the day I first felt sure
Of what I long had hoped, and once before,
Here on this very ocean-side, believed
But gradually doubted when deceived—
O day, O night, of certitude Divine,
I sing your worth for proving he is mine !
Or rather, let me praise kind Heaven for this
Most precious token of our blending bliss.
Thee also would I laud, my vanished mate !
For that return from thy laborious state ;
And that high mission upon me bestowed
Of thus illumining thy dark abode ;
Of mitigating thus thy toil and pain,
And shewing me I do not live in vain.
Mine thou art ever ! two, of either sex,
We shall be one at last ; no more I vex

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

My soul by doubting it, who long have known
A man or woman is not formed alone :
For as humanity is in two parts,
One male, one female, we are paired in hearts.
Each seeks the other through the mortal state,
Oft vainly here, to know it oft too late—
Ah, how we question ! how we hope that one
Whom we have peeped at, or who hath begun
To glance at us, the destined mate will prove ;
How all believe it who begin to love !
Yet passion only is no certain sign,
Nor marriage, that we win the end Divine :
O'er many might be writ this epitaph,
“ Though wedded, neither won the better half.”
The many mate not till they have discerned
Unerring tokens of a love returned.
Hath it the quality of a cement
Uniting two, each for the other meant ?
The few will peer, and probe, and taste, and test,
To mourn, or murmur, o'er the empty quest.
Like creeping things that put antennæ out,
So wandering earthbound spirits feel about ;
Just touching, like two ants when first they meet,
Each moves away some other one to greet ;
Oft, e'en when fettered by the marriage tie—
The body bound, the soul at liberty.
Are we the sport of watchers from Above,
We mortals seeking one whom we can love :

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

As 'mid the revels oft at Christmas-tide
One waits without a door, to come inside
And grope, and single out, with bandaged eyes,
Her whom onlookers choose, and win a prize ;
So from outside we enter the world's room
Sightless from sense, and feeling through the gloom ;
While evil spirits laugh o'er each mistake
Good angels crown us if their choice we make.
Or, shall I put it ? life is but a game
Of blind-man's-buff, where if a heart can name,
'Mid many a blow and shock, another right,
He wins a cheer, and with uncurtained sight
Views round his chosen every other guest
To greet the one, and gambol with the rest.
Love, that the intuitions of the soul
Fulfil, alone makes two a perfect whole—
True sympathy that blends a diverse dower
And fuses a disparity of power.
Thus somewhere, somehow, in the Universe
Each pair unites for better or for worse—
For worse, in this or other half-way states ;
For better, at the end of Time, true mates—
Somewhere, no doubt, but where ? I often think
That there are souls on earth who cannot link ;
Their counterpart is in another life,
In Heaven the unfound husband, here the wife ;
Or haply they have met before, and he
Is in some penal state, while she is free.

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

Ay, we may pass thro' myriad worlds (who knows?)
And only find our consort at the close ;
Or thro' some life he may be with us, yet
Not in the next ; and so our lids are wet
Thro' that sad pilgrimage, our empty hearts
Pining for food that Love alone imparts ;
And hence the hungry eyes, the pallid face,
The restless course that here too oft we trace.
Ah ! if they knew it, the wise Power Above
Would train them thus for a Diviner Love ;
And it might foil His ends were they to know
They yet shall banquet upon love below.
Somehow, no doubt, but how? E'en in this world
There be no rules of meeting ; men are hurled
Almost, at women, out of Fortune's sling.
Some dance like gnats together on the wing ;
This floats alone beneath a summer sky,
That in a sunbeam basks, a golden fly ;
Two meet like moths amid the leafy boughs,
To woo and win, yet part with broken vows ;
These flock like larks in winter on the ground,
To wander here and there till food be found ;
And, if disturbed, soar Heavenward from the wrong,
Yet each with private vision, lonely song ;
Those rise, like solitaries from the marsh,
That pipe with plover, yet in tone more harsh.
Oft men and women, each the other mocks,
And fly like chaffinches in separate flocks ;

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

Or if they join they but beholders charm,
Like yellow-hammers round a wintry farm.
Yes, tho' quite sure to mingle soon or late,
Who can forecast when he shall find his fate ?
A meeting in the market, shop, or hall,
Near neighbourhood at concert, rout, or ball,
A country walk, a holiday at sea,
A helping hand, a proffered courtesy,
A look behind whereat another stops,
Even a lifted kerchief that one drops :
Such trifles oft have lent a joyous hue,
Or tinge of sadness, to the lives of two—
Nay, many a time have proved the opening act
In a life-tragedy of awful fact.
Yet who can call it accident ? Not I,
Who chanced upon thee thus, dear guilty Guy !—
Chanced here upon thee, for we blent before,
Yea, thou and I, on some Celestial Shore ;
Or was it some unshadowed life of Time,
So cloudless as to seem a heavenly Clime,
Whose after-glow doth on my spirit sleep,
The dying rose of sunset on her deep ;
That light on the horizon of the heart
Which lingers when its fountain doth depart,
To leave an amber line that, kept in sight,
May make this twilit state a summer night ?
I know but this, that there we met, and thou
Must e'en have wandered from some holy vow,

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

Or done some darkness which hath proved the root
Of evil in our world, and borne the fruit
That issues now in this the travail-pain
Of a new birth to Righteousness again ;
He, the all-loving Guide, permitting this
As the one road maybe to final Bliss.
Doth Holy Writ affirm that there be some
Born for perdition? Haply they become
Thus only found for sanctity at last !
Just as the wilful child, whose hand hath passed
(The Parent looking on) thro' the fierce fire,
Owns the bright flame no more his heart's desire.
The Gardener Who tends these souls of ours,
That they may yield the fairest, brightest flowers,
Finds soil that will be richer for repose,
And from the foul manure thereon He grows,
The sterile time fulfilled, a lovely bloom
To justify the dark and barren doom.
What if it were the human destiny
To live in every globe that studs the sky,
Would it be much to pass thro' fiery Mars,
If silvery Venus, and uncounted stars
On an ascending scale of argent bliss
Awaited the emerged from that abyss?
But be that as it may—Heaven ordered it
For us to meet and part ; and I submit,
Blest in the certainty that we are one,
And sure that I with thee have now begun

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

The settled work which we must finish ere
We can the after-joy together share.
So hidden is their life and lot who leave
This world, I know not how we interweave.
I wonder if thou feelest now for me,
Dear heart! as fondly as I feel for thee.
Canst thou by added faculty now touch
Me more for good than I thee, or as much?
Thou wert no subject of my influence
Here, wrapped in vice, and curtained by dull sense;
Thy mother's spirit, too, was impotent
To check thee from each infamous intent;
Yet this I feel, and with delight, divine,
That she above, and I below, combine
As God's true agents, now to lighten thee
From all that weighs thee down from liberty.'

Lone I linger on the shore
Where I walked with thee of yore,
For a something seems to say
Thou wilt come to me to-day.

Fitly could the golden light
Chariot a soul so bright:
Wilt thou on the shining way
Down the sunlit ocean stray?

Bringing to my face the glow
That it wore with thee below,
Kindling in my heart the fire
Of a passionate desire.

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

Wilt thou in an eager wave
My retiring footsteps lave ?
As we once were wont to meet,
Thou a suitor at my feet ;

Rippling round me, or perchance
As the billows oft advance,
Breaking when they win their home
Into passion-tears or foam ;

Mournful like the sea perhaps
That the flinty shingle laps,
Or exultant, as the waves
Triumph when the whirlwind raves.

Wilt thou in a lovely breeze
Wander o'er the sapphire seas
To unfever heart and brow
As the zephyr cools me now ;

Whispering from heaven above
To my heart of deathless love,
Leaving on my lip a kiss,
To recall our bygone bliss ?

Come in what, and as thou wilt,
Wave or wind or shining gilt ;
Only come ! for life is lone,
Earth is cold, since thou hast flown.

Come ! for thrilling to thee, I
Shall be sure that thou art nigh—
And, of joy and hope bereft,
Know too well when thou hast left !

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

XXII.

Death-shadowed daughter, dejected and tearful,
Brooding in dread o'er the imminent change,
Ponder how Nature would rally the fearful ;
O'er her kind comfort in memory range !

Watch the red sun in delight disappearing
Under mysterious Ocean's far rim,
In the sure hope of a bright reappearing,
Fraught with new glory for earth chill and dim !

Even the ebb-tide will sparkle and glisten
Down to the death of the level below,
Waiting the hour when the wavelets shall listen
To the light breezes that bid them reflow.

Mark how the shell on the golden sand gleaming,
Wears all the rainbow that ocean could spell,
For a bright sign that the tenant was dreaming
Hopefully of a far lovelier cell !

Picture the sea-bird that airily flitting
O'er a wild deep, as we do when alive,
Feels the sure impulse, and fairly sitting,
Certain to rise begins calmly to dive !

Look how the lily resigns uncomplaining
All the white bloom that the summer winds shed !
See her decayed in the darkness remaining,
Till a warm Easter-balm breathes on the dead !

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

As the old plane-leaf ensheathes while decaying
One that with beauty will burst when it dies,
So a new form with resplendent arraying
From the due death of the body shall rise.

As at thy starting the care of a mother
Folded the weary, and sang thee to rest,
So at thy finish will Earth be another ;
Fair be thy dreams in the sleep on her breast !

Bright be thy waking, for Mercy maternal
In the new morning shall bid thee arise,
Don the white robe of a being eternal
And spring aloft to Delight in the Skies !

Sad Thea waiting, in Death's portico,
Her lonely cell, thus passionately cried :
' Thou who hast heard my prayer uplifted oft
In hours of transient trouble, love, or pain,
When I besieged thee, begging thee delay
No more to ravish me from grief and wrong—
Thou, tardy in the past, attentive now,
And hovering above me, mighty Death !
Be not too mighty for this fearful heart
Who owns that she hath wronged thy majesty,
Not knowing what she needed, what she asked,
And bids thee now take pity and begone.
Wing thee away, kind Death ! and brood instead
Above the many that are wooing thee,
Full certain that thine advent were a boon,

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

Who hail thee as the one physician with
Sure balm to medicine the woe of life,
The faithful nurse who tending them from youth,
And keeping nigh them, tho' unwelcome oft,
Is called at last to rock them to their rest.
Begone from me, and hover around them !
To some, still young like me, be as a fay
With popped spell to wave them into sleep,
And happy visions of unearthly things ;
But not to me, O not to me, just now,
Just now when all the world looks bright and fair,
Fairer than ever, brighter than before !
One glance of Beauty now looks finer far
Than her tame plenitude in happier hours.
I never saw a sunbeam like yon ray
That glinting thro' the casement gilds my wall.
Such perfect blue I never yet beheld,
As the pure heaven that thro' my window peeps.
Yon lovely thrush, can he be of the kind
That tuned a common pipe in those dear woods
From whence I fled with thee, dishonoured Guy ?
Thy murderer ? Ah ! I had died for thee,
Died oft and gladly hadst thou been but true.

‘ Nay, could I dare to think, I should behold
My first fair love, as mid the joy of old,
And that I should be lovely in his sight
As ere his falsehood turned my day to night—

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

Could I but hope this I would welcome thee,
Dark Death ! but no, the outlook is for me
Too sad, too terrible ; and ah ! too grim,
Too awful, what I have to meet of him
In that strange border-World where spirits stay
When swept from Earth, perchance till the Great Day.
Yet there I go to-morrow—O dear Death
Have mercy ! Leave me now ; quench not my breath !
I cannot, will not die ! I am too young,
Earth's story half, her triumph all, unsung !
Hope is before me still, and even love
(Who knows ?) might one day gild me from Above.
No heart have I to give, but had I one
'Twere his in time, who shone, a golden sun
Of radiant beauty, 'mid the gathering gloom
Of those black hours that ended with my doom.
Paul, Paul, my one, my best, my only friend,
Shine on me quickly, glisten to the end !
The end—no, no, it cannot be ; the Right
Who ruled rebellious Herod will to-night
Send some sweet shining Angel who will cause
My watchful keepers to obey His laws,
And, 'mid their slumber, spirit me away
Thro' open gates along a happy way—
Or, better still, far better, bring his guilt
To light who shed the blood, ere mine be spilt.
Ah ! leave me Death : too hard it is to die
For what another must have done, not I.

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

Pain could I bear, but never, never shame :
I cannot perish with a blackened name—
I who am now, God knows I knew it not,
The mistress of as fair an earthly lot,
As long a lineage as Birth can vaunt—
I, left to point the proverb, and the taunt—
I, execrated on the scaffold first,
And buried after in a grave accurst !
It cannot, must not be !' Yet the dark thought,
For all its terror, to her eyelids brought,
Heavy with tears, that tranquil slumber-state
Which visits weary mourners soon or late.
Like the white lining of the clouds that weep
Is the sure outcome of all trouble, Sleep.
It came to Thea in its fairest form,
The lovely calm that follows on a storm—
Or, say a beaming Angel came, who found
Her spirit in a prison-house, and bound ;
Her wakeful eyes, the sentinels that kept
True guard, were hypnotised, and fast they slept.
He bade the gates fly open, and the sight
Before her was a City of delight,
Whose King was One that died a shameful Death
Nigh God-forsaken till His final Breath ;
And thrones were round Him, consecrate to those
Who bore life's burdens faithful to its close—
Earth-rulers even now, with better hope
And helping others with its ill to cope ;

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

And next the King were all the true and brave
Who care like Him nor life, nor name, to save ;
And Earth's divinest splendour, what was this
Compared with that bright loveliness and bliss?
'Twas but a vision, yet when she awoke
The spell that bound her heart before was broke.
'Twas daylight still, yet felt she fit to rest
That night, like Peter, knowing Death was best,
Yet willing, should some Angel be her friend,
To live like rescued Peter to the end :
Ready, like Paul of old, to die or live,
For Christ in either case due strength would give.
But who is this? another Paul? 'Ah! yes.
He comes, he comes, to comfort and to bless!
'Tis thou, my friend, at last, at last!' she cried.
'Yes, with thee now and ever!' he replied.
'I will not mock thee with a tale of love :
My feelings will be known to thee Above.
For, if I may, all that I spare thee now
I will impart. I ask of thee no vow,
Nor aught that they bestow who love on Earth—
I fear thou couldst not give it ; but the birth
Into yon nobler world will wake in thee
What here thou lackest to be one with me.
Ah! I unsay it all ; I ask thee this—
That, ere we part, thou leave me one pure kiss
Upon these lips, to hallow them as thine
Thro' all Eternity! by that true sign

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

To make me sure thy spirit, if she may,
Will mingle here with mine until the day
When pitying Heaven my loneliness shall end.
Grant me this final boon, my fondest friend !
And Thea kissed him, tho' with ne'er a word.
Then one appeared to tell him he had erred
In deeming he could stay up till the last,
For now the hour of interview had passed.
'Farewell!' he murmured; 'mid the throng I stand
To-morrow ; wave adieu with thy dear hand !'

Darling, in the World of Light
We are told they marry not !
Yet the two that here unite
Surely win a common lot.

Entering the better state
With a union thus complete,
Somewhere, somehow, each the mate
Of the other, they will meet.

Plighted on the dusky shore
Ere thou launch upon the tide—
Wilt thou watch my voyage o'er,
Radiant on the other side ?

Or must I from the dark strand
Start more sad than thou, my own !
None to mark me sail or land,
All, from first to last, alone ?

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

Christ attend thee—me as well !
Clear the outlook, and revive
In the groves of asphodel
This our vow when we arrive !
Wistfully we may at first
Roam thro' aramanthine flowers,
Or at once the Past may burst
On our heart 'mid heavenly bowers.
Inland we, far far away
From the mortal tide, will roam ;
Gales from the wild ocean stray
Never to that deathless Home.
Courage, darling ! ere we part,
Fading from each other's view,
Let me clasp thee to my heart
In a passionate adieu !

XXIII.

'Twas midnight, and at the appointed hour
The lovely bells pealed out from Arba Tower
A tune more plaintive than is ever heard
In Nature's Orchestra from man or bird.
Uncounted cost was lavished on that chime
By him now rapt beyond the tones of Time :
And few could know the labour he had spent
That Art with melody might here be blent.
Now, campanology would be at fault
To wake the echoes thro' the spangled vault,

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

The silent streets, the quiet moonlit plain,
The silvered wood, the phosphorescent main,
As those sweet sentinels of Time then woke
Elf-dreamers in aerial deeps, who spoke
In accents of Divine complaint that welled
Into harmonious rapture, which excelled
All melody that meeteth mortal ears,
All music save the music of the spheres,
Then, sweetly fainting, faded quite away,
As back the elves in airy chambers lay.
Not many lovelier tunes have sounded out
Since the primeval starry matin-shout,
Or the Angelic hymn that hailed the Birth
Of Bethlehem's Babe upon a wintry Earth.
The tender anthem on the tearful brink
Of dark Gethsemane, I can but think
Blent fuller tones from many a Christian tongue
Than any a carillon ever rung.
Few fairer sounds from Earth to Sky have risen
Than strains that rose from a Philippian prison ;
And e'en discordant notes from martyr-cells
Are far above the concord of joy-bells.
But saving many such, no tuneful noise
Hath ever seemed more eloquent of joys,
And woes, pain present, bliss to come,
And triumph that should all true conflict sum,
'The sense of tears' in every present thing,
The wistfulness the future yet may bring.

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

'Twas like the pathos of the pleading sea,
Nay, of short Time and long Eternity,
Of brief endeavour and sublime reward.
And every mortal mood did it record—
It told of weary work and quiet rest,
Of patient anguish waiting to be blest,
Of pining grief and rapturous delight,
Hatred of Wrong and worship of the Right,
The wilful swerving from an ordered course,
Empty regret and infinite remorse,
Vague final hope that saved from deep despair,
And more, far more was told into the air.
Beyond the metal, past the power of sound,
Was Potency above all Time, all Bound,
Tho' tied to Time and manacled to Space,
A sublimated human form and face.
'Tis spirit that is voiced in those clear bells,
And what it feels and can recount it tells ;
And infinitely more of woe and pain
Than even spirit ever could explain.
That impotence is voiced in every tone ;
One tries to tell what cannot here be known,
And seeks to move the listening heart and mind,
By faint suggestion of what lives behind
The tawdry and evanishing delight
Of touch, and taste, and smell, and sound, and sight.
And who can hear them with unmoistened eye
That knows the spirit in the chime is Guy?

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

They feel it faintly—some half out of reach
Of its strange influence ; yet all, and each.
Asleep are most, and to their sense it seems
To lend a charm or pathos to their dreams.
Some sat or sported on a wild sea-shore
To hear, beneath the ripple or the roar,
That constant undertone which sounds as tho'
The billows suffer, both in ebb and flow.
Some bared the forehead to a summer wind ;
Some felt a spring or wintry gale, to find
In each air-wave a melancholy strain
As of divinity in mortal pain.
Some, spell-bound by rare music, longed to rise
From the sad dominant that underlies
All harmony which owed a blessed birth
To angel-hearts once doomed to tearful Earth.
And wakeful ones lie thinking on their bed
Of what that peal is telling from the dead,
To act on golden resolutions, born
Of its high alchemy, to-morrow morn.
And Ida listens with mute thankfulness
To gentle Heaven, Who she hopes will bless
Her feeble lifelong effort to restore
One now beloved far better than before.
Poor Thea hears it, and is back again
Behind the dusky laurels, and would fain
For ever listen to the lips that told
Then how her beauty shamed the blue and gold—

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

The lips that now seem telling her the worth
Of the few hours still left to her on earth,
And bid her timely absolution win
For wronging her Superior and kin,
By bursting bonds to take her rebel way,
And leaving love with too unbridled sway.
And Norman ringing, none feels more than he
Time's worth to her, thro' his own liberty.
What now can save her on death's very brink?
He ponders over each un pitying link
Of the firm chain of evidence to find
His heart absolve her fully, but his mind
Compelled to own the bond secure indeed.
Impossible such proof to supersede!
And yet she should be saved, he swore, but how?
And on one hand he lent his troubled brow,
When, overbalanced quite, he nearly fell,
To lose his purchase of a swinging bell.
Great God! what mean the sudden upward gaze,
The terror-stricken look of wild amaze,
From that wan vagrant who had hurried by
But for the failure of the harmony?
What can he see? No earthly sight could make
A mortal man thus agonize and quake!
And Norman, peering on the face so grim,
The form so ghastly, recognises him
As Max, a foreigner who lately left
His own employ, when of a child bereft,

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

He had departed for his distant home
And wife, resolving thence no more to roam.
Why is he back, and what doth he now view
To cause the mortal fright, the ashen hue,
The totter, and the sinking to the ground ?
Then Norman, after he had glanced around,
To find that none are near for succour, ends
The plaintive chiming music, and descends,
To hear him murmur that, now seized by death,
Somewhat he wished to tell ere his last breath.
Borne to a neighbouring hostel, and a balm
Administered, he soon is rendered calm,
Full calm enough this story to relate ;
In tones sufficiently articulate
For those to understand whom Norman made
(That needful rules of law might be obeyed)
Record them, and his signature obtain
Before he grew too weak from mortal pain.

XXIV.

‘ I had a daughter with an angel face,
A heart as innocent as spotless snow.
More beauty never was on Earth ; more grace,
More charm from mortal lips could hardly flow.
Well nurtured by her mother and myself,
As bright a life she lived as any could,
A lovely babe, a little blue-eyed elf

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

None ever knew more promise in a child,
Or more fulfilment in sweet maidenhood.
From virtue her pure heart a fiend beguiled ;
Tempted, she fell, and then no longer sang, or smiled.

A while we knew not who had ruined her ;
But prints in snow are known by measurement ;
And, by a scrutiny that scarce could err,
We found that one thro' her white heart had bent
A foul and crooked path to leave his mark.
Confronted, he confessed it, and agreed
To marry her, and keep the bygone dark.
Rather would we have let the villain go,
But that we could not hear her vainly plead
For our permission, as she loved him so ;
Yet well I knew what was before her—shame and
 woe.

The promise proved a ruse that he might sport
More freely with her love, and he the while
(We heard) clandestinely was paying court
To other victims of his vice and guile—
One in particular who from a school
Not far away had met him many a night,
And whom he led at length to scorn the rule
Of her instructress, and with him elope,
To leave my daughter in that shameful plight
Which naught but Marriage covers. Then all scope
For the fulfilment of his vow was gone, and hope—

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

The hope that buoyed her up until she heard
That he had left the new love like the rest—
The many dupes like them of hope deferred,
Who once had hailed him as a favoured guest :
Now he had vanished, leaving them, we found,
With empty promises, for some far land.
Ah ! when I knew the misery around,
And saw my child, whom he had led astray,
Dishonoured, can you wonder that my hand
Grew restless till I reckoned with him, nay,
That I left all beside till I had found the way ?

I wrote to Norman, for he often came
To cities near for new machinery.
He offered me (our craft was much the same)
Employment in his works beyond the sea.
I closed with him anon, for I was told
That Guy's far home (I name him now) was there ;
And I was ready to sell time and gold,
Nay life, if needful, to avenge our wrong.
Deserving death, his life I meant to spare,
But to chastise him with an arm so strong
That he should never cease to suffer for his wrong.

But hearing he was now to take a bride,
And pitying the lady he had won,
And tidings coming that my girl had died
(Fading like daylight at a vanished sun)

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

I, hardly master of a wandering will,
And brooding o'er our loss and trouble, taught
My heart to pine for darker vengeance, till
The yearning grew into a stern resolve.
When to destroy him was my constant thought,
And *how*, the problem that I had to solve,
Not dreaming that the act would other lives involve.

I left upon the plea of my sad loss,
Which Norman thought required my presence home.
But no, the sea I vowed I would not cross,
With Guy alive, and I resolved to roam
Around, and snatch my opportunity.
Long, long I waited, but it came at last.
His hours and ways I knew, and quietly
I watched one evening till he left the grove,
Hid in the lane down which he always passed
When he had parted from his lady-love,
Ere to the silent shore he went to dream or rove.

A certain chance I gave him for his life—
Sheer murder was not in me even then.
Peeping, I saw he held a curious knife ;
And so I cried, out-rushing, ' We two men
Must fight till death, and villain, thou shalt die !
Defend thyself, if sin have left thee might !'
One startled look, and seeing it was I,
He let me lunge, and parried not my thrust,
Too conscious, may be, of his guilt to fight ;

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

He bore the fitting due of fraud and lust—
Pierced to the very heart, his life-blood stained the
dust.

Great God! the pendulum now swinging back,
I stood aghast. The murderer's first care,
Concealment of the crime, began to rack
A terror-stricken heart. Earth, water, air—
Which had the most to offer me in aid?
Was I to dig, and bury the vile thing,
Let it decay while hidden in the glade,
Or bid the river keep the secret close?
Then the undying worm began to sting
Which from that hour hath murdered my repose,
While friendly sights and sounds became my
banded foes.

It was a foretaste of what now I feel,
A forediscernment of what now I know—
Now that from finer sense Death lifts the seal,
To half uncurtain the strange scene below.
'Tis not alone that Nature doth reflect
The shifting moods of many-sided man,
Or that his spirit doth itself project
On Earth and beckon back, or bid her nod.
'Tis that we live beneath her laugh or ban,
Because 'mid thorns or garden-walk is God
To bless, to glance thro' trees, to hear the blood-
voiced sod.

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

The aspens shook at me, and I began
To quiver too ; the beeches moaned ' For shame !'
A violet bent over the dead man,
A dewy daisy looked at me in blame,
And tearful bluebells nodded in despair ;
A weeping willow sighed ; a silver birch
Waved like a woman with dishevelled hair ;
And elegiac blackbirds softly blent
With two sweet robins from their leafy perch ;
Bees left the blooms to murmur sad consent ;
And soon the frowning skies to a wild woe gave
vent.

All Nature voiced His awful Word Who saith
" Vengeance is Mine," and pity for the dead.
" Who missioned thee to drag him down to death,
Still hopeful, with his sins upon his head ?"
So asked the gale, methought, the thunder too,
And Echo asked it, and the forest aisle,
And mountain solitudes repeated " Who ?"
My conscience asked it, but without reply.
But ah ! no time for self-accusing while
The corpse lay bare ; how should I falsify
The proofs ? Earth, water, air, refused to back the lie.

Save that the river washed the body clean ;
Which done, I tried to drag it to the Clock,
Knowing it would remain for long unseen
If I the secret chamber could unlock.

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

But O the burden ! O the awful work !
Yet after many a hindrance and delay,
Fearful lest spies should in the bushes lurk,
I put the body as and where 'twas found,
Like one self-murdered, and then fled away,
Forgetting wholly, startled by a sound,
The door unlocked, the knife and coat left on the
ground.

By guilty conscience hounded, and pursued
In fancy by a myriad foes, I won
My home at last, self-sentenced now to brood
Over the crime so vainly wished undone.
They told me Thea long had followed Guy ;
When, horror ! one dark day the news was brought
That she, found guilty, was about to die,
Without a hope of mercy, for the deed
That my ensanguined hands had wholly wrought.
The day of doom was near ! Could I succeed
In rescuing the girl by energy and speed ?

Far keener was the torture of the doubt
Than of my fear and vain remorse before.
I journeyed day and night, and, wearied out,
Arrived, thank Heaven ! in time, but nothing more.
To reach the jail, and yield my body up
In place of hers, I passed the Clock whose chime
Rang out so sweetly that I thought my cup

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

Was full. One bitterness remained—
So bitter that methinks the foulest crime
Would well receive its due in one so pained;
Kind Heaven now lets me die who the dread cup
have drained.

“Look up!” methought the final peal had said,
In tones I knew too well; and up I glanced,
To see the very features of the dead
Shine thro’ the Clock, as if his ghost advanced
From the machinery in that dark room,
And voicing first his accents in each bell,
Would by a look prepare me for my doom.
That look of infinite reproach and pain—
Good God! to have to gaze on it was hell.
Then thro’ the dial-hands his own moved plain,
As if to point me out that all escape was vain.

Spell-bound I stood till fainting Nature failed.
I know not how I came here, but I feel
Enough of life has over death prevailed
That this confession I may make and seal;
And now, the phantom-fear and torture gone,
I own the mercy that with judgment blent.
In the calm retrospect I feel there shone
A heavenly gleam thro’ that appalling face,
A hope of pity for the penitent,
A look that urged, with a forewarning grace,
The worth of Time to save yon girl a death so base.’

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

XXV.

Quick, Norman, quick! prevent the dawn;
Nor let night's curtain be withdrawn
Without her innocence revealed
Whose mortal doom will else be sealed.
The story signed, leave him whose breath
Indited it to peaceful Death.
Quick to the Judge! and waken him
To study in the twilight dim
The precious tale, and bid him ope
The prison, barred to utter hope!
Obtain the due reprieve, and speed
With those told off to stay the deed.
Quick to the Sheriff! and the task
May be thine own, if thou but ask.
Quick to the warders! bid them stop
The work of scaffold, beam and drop.
Quick, quick, to Paul! for surely he
Should be the angel with the key
To bid her from calm sleep arise
In chainless triumph and surprise.
Quick to the cell! and find them both
Enraptured, hand in hand, and loath
To quit the room which Grace Divine
Hath turned into a marriage shrine;
Leave them to Love, and tell the crowd,
Fast gathering now, the news aloud!

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

Death-wooded and almost won, she now
Is Paul's by an eternal vow.
And, if she have but a reprieve,
Nor be allowed the jail to leave
Until another Court can sit
Her doom to cancel or remit,
Then for the hour that they are free,
Prepare a splendid jubilee!
Bid all the men of Arba keep
It holiday, nor let one weep.
Tell them to throng the gate and shout
The moment that the pair pass out.
Quick to the Tower! and ring the bells
Right gladly, for they leave the cells.
The portals are flung open wide
And Paul emerges with his bride.

Sun with the dying face,
Billows in foamy chace,
Whirlwinds that howl thro' space,
Do your full harm!
Vainly will fearful night,
Tidal and stormy fight,
Cope with the threefold might
Of Nature's charm.

Is there no cheer at hand,
The while we bravely stand
On the beleaguered strand
Fronting your worst?

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

Moonbeams the midnight mock ;
Rainbows escape the rock
When thro' the tempest-shock
Wild billows burst.

Is there not set a bound
To your advance, which found,
Each of you can but round
Back to the start ?
Night yields to dawning day,
Tides turn the seaward way,
Whirlwinds, their roundelay
Ended, depart.

Is there no joy in store
When darkness, dash and roar
Vanishing, the sad shore
Glistens at last ?
Brighter the sun will beam ;
Lovelier shells will gleam ;
Breezes more balmy seem
For the rude past.

XXVI.

And all the human feeling that before
Informed that chime now carolled forth, and more ;
There was a something, a light tone, that spelt
Guy's bliss as well as anguish, many felt.
The Dives in him joyed that from his woe
That murderer had turned while here below.

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

The Angel in him triumphed at the sight
Of evil changed to good, and wrong to right.
The Christ in him grew glad o'er faithful hearts
United in the love that nothing parts,
And o'er the subjects of a nobler sway
Than his who lorded it in ease and play.
And Paul and Thea understood quite well
The exhortation in each tuneful bell,
That bade her, bearing the ancestral name,
Discharge all debt, and satisfy each claim—
That told him, sharer of the dignity,
Her honour and respect to fortify—
That urged them, owners of the ancient soil,
To lift the hearts, and cheer the lives, that toil.
Ah! hapless Guy, 'tis best that thou art there!
Best that the castle grey, the landscape fair,
Know thee no more—that garden, park, and field,
To other than thyself their harvest yield;
Best for the victims of thy sore neglect
That these new nobles thy default correct;
And best for them that now in wedded youth
They face a work of love, a toil of truth,
Nor haunt the rosy lane, the violet shade,
Where spirits are unnerved, and vows unmade;
Best, best for thee! O better, better far
Guide, even were it from some penal star,
Vain mortals into weal than win delight
By luring them 'mid Earth's fair fields from right.

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

Better be felled or blasted from on high,
Than falsely stand like one who seeks the Sky ;
A yewtree planted amid ancient graves
For shade, yet who with coral poison paves
The common pathway leading to the tomb,
Charming young heartstowhatmayprovetheirdoom.
Far better fade, plucked up by the vile root,
Than in the green hedge flower, and yield bright fruit
That many feed on who its beauty spy,
To sicken soon, and in the ditch to die.
Far better yearn, nay, agonize like this,
Than revel here, yet fail of final bliss !

XXVII.

Were I not meant to love
Why did the Powers above
Endow thee with such grace,
And glorify thy face?
Why is the sweet display
Before me every day ?
Thou wert not made so fair
To drive me to despair.

The sun will nothing scorn
That worships him at morn.
The flower that turns an eye
Away from him would die :

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

And I am made to live,
And thou art meant to give
Thy golden charm to one
Who thrones thee for his sun.

The moon that men admire
Veils not her silvery fire ;
No star whereon we gaze
Would curtain its pure rays :
But, ah ! an eye that burns
With lovely splendour turns
To others when I fain
The glances would detain.

They throng her, but are far
From love as any star :
While I, she feels with fear,
Tho' distant, am too near.
She knows they would less soon
Woo her than court the moon :
Too well doth she divine
I long to make her mine.

Another too must Norman tell
To whom not quickly did he go.
For Ida, when the final bell
Had stilled its tongue, he saw below.
Roused from her slumber by the peal,
She reached the Tower, the cause to learn.
He watched her, and began to feel
The old regard for her return.

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

She looked all pale and woebegone,
Yet full of loveliness and grace ;
The trouble she had undergone
Brought out the angel in her face.
Ah ! would she in her loneliness
Now yield the heart she once denied ?
Nay, he would be content with less—
The hand ; and once become his bride,
The love that cannot be compelled
Would surely not be long withheld.
The happy tidings of this morn,
Tho' they might make her feel forlorn,
Would the bright bygone day recall
When Guy and she first told him all,
And he who knew Guy's fickle Past
Feared that the brightness would not last,
And frowned because he loved her so,
And could but share her grief and woe.
The tidings too would bid her see
Him innocent, nor only free ;
And make her feel how he had borne
Anguish unmerited and scorn.
Should he now, heralding the news,
Beg her no longer to refuse
His proffered love ? All this and more
Was anxiously revolved before
Confronting her—but ah ! one glance
Sufficed to prove her in a trance.

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

Upon the Clock her eyes, tho' wet
With tears of thankful joy, were set.
Her lips were wreathed in such a smile
As they wear only who beguile
A lonely lot by intercourse
With dear ones who have run their course,
And parted, as in ebb and flow
Of talk that none but lovers know.
And Norman stood awhile to gaze
Upon her only, in amaze.
He could not undergo the risk
Of looking at that awful disc.
'The face that glowed on guilty Max
Is here,' he thought, 'nor would relax
For me the features sinister,
As plainly it hath done for her ;
And it might kill her if I broke
In on their intercourse, and spoke.'
But was it that dark things grew clear
While breathing that strange atmosphere ?
Was it that spirit had impressed
High lore on a receptive breast ?
Or was it that he gazed too long
On spell-bound Ida to be wrong ?
I know not ; but he felt it true
That all he came to tell she knew—
The windings of that guilty tale
Which proved that Justice must prevail ;

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

That Thea, free, had promised Paul
To marry him—she knew it all.
And ah ! this too—that love still burned
In Norman's breast, still unreturned—
Still unreturned ; for evermore
Her heart was in the silent Shore,
His haunt whose toil she had been dowered
By Heaven to lighten, and empowered.
No love had she except for him,
No joy but in the vision dim,
The parley she now held, and must
Hold till her form returned to dust,
And her free spirit joined him there
Perchance his lightened toil to share.
A something made it look as tho'
She meant her suitor this to know,
And spare both him and her the pain
Of melting his fond dream again.
Awhile he sadly mused, and left
Like one of a last hope bereft.
His was this only now—to be
Residuary legatee
Of empty love—one winning fame,
Thro' her who might have borne his name.
Yet something better worth ere long,
When Time should medicine his wrong,
And bid the Bygone draw the veil
That curtained half her touching tale—

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

One, nobler for the retrospect
Of his desire, and her neglect;
With faith more fervent from the sight
Of hers perpetually bright—
One, more inclined to honour Truth
From her fidelity 'mid ruth—
One, apt to learn the worth of Love
Less from below than from Above.

I did not err who thought
We were together brought
That thro' thy beauty I
Should live, nor fade and die :
But I have learnt to see
Thy love is not for me.
I vanish from thy view,
Yet bid me not adieu !

Because I shall behold
Thy grace in noonday gold ;
And in the silvery night
Discern thy holy light.
High Heaven hath set the sun
For all, and not for one :
No single heart absorbs
The cheer of midnight orbs.

I know not if above
They woo the sun with love,
Besiege the moon with sighs,
The stars with pleading eyes :

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

'Tis certain we below,
Fond debtors to their glow,
Can wonder, and adore,
And copy, but no more.

Be then a paragon
For me to muse upon :
A sun before whose gold
The heart's fair flowers unfold :
A moon with argent beams
To lighten dusky dreams :
A constellation bright
To lead my steps aright !

XXVIII.

Ring, happy bells of Time !
Nature, impart
To the melodious chime
Songs from thy heart !
Winds, a wild trumpet blow !
Waves, let your music flow !
Birds above, bees below,
Sing a due part !

To the carillon lend,
Art, all thy best ;
North, to the East now send,
South, to the West,

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

From steeple, tower, and clock,
Peals of joy, Care to mock,
And her sad captives rock
Gaily to rest.

Spells from Eternity,
Voicing the true,
Time-bells have harmony
Only thro' you !
Beauty, Love, Righteousness,
Thro' Art and Nature's dress,
Breathe your delight, and bless
The wedded two !

The vapours have melted, the Sun from a throne
Above
Hath shone out, and belted the Earth with a zone
Of love.

The pastures are springing, the gardens are glad
With hope ;
The thickets are ringing, from warblers too mad
To mope.

And tears were a shame when the Sun in his course
Doth glow
With answering flame on the gilt of the gorse
Below ;
When sweet things that woo, wide awake from the
mist
Of night,

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

Seem on fire like the two, that now stand where
they kissed In light.

For Joy hovers o'er them, to banish the pain
Of old ;

Hope beckons before them, and points to the plain
Of gold.

The flowers let them grace you, the thorns may
they harm You not !

God's sunshine embrace you ; Love's melody charm
Your lot !

XXIX.

Now that this lay of a long vanished time
Hath neared its term, their future I recount
Of whom it sings. The spirit-haunted chime
Wafted rare music o'er field, dale, and mount ;
And they would tell you who know Arba best
Of its sure charm, and potency for good —
That Youth, thro' it, for labour bartered rest
And Middle-life the better did its due,
And Age that o'er the Past would sadly brood
Oft to vain melancholy bade adieu
And started thro' its tones to life and effort new.

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

While many a story is afloat of how
The phantom face that thro' the dial shone
Warned tempted Christians not to break their vow,
Or checked one who to ruin else had gone;
And youths and maidens have been known to work
The harder lest it fright them suddenly;
And rogues and thieves who otherwise would lurk
For evil ends, have thought of it, and turned.
And you might hear that many a tearful eye
Hath won new cheer, and chilly hearts have burned,
From mysteries that they thro' it have strangely
learned.

And Paul and Thea, happy man and wife,
(Need I record it?) used their ample wealth
Wisely and well, and led a noble life
Of open usefulness, and good by stealth.
The heir (they called him Guy, that the old stock
Fail not of the ancestral name) once asked
That he, an artist, might improve the Clock
By decoration; and with due consent,
His time and taste, and utmost skill, were tasked
To mould and fix an Angel-form that blent
Eternity and Time with hallowing intent.
And Ida's action ever and anon
Became to all who knew her a sure proof
That in her heart a spirit-light had shone,
And she had carried out its high behoof,

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

Fulfilling thus an ordered ministry.
And soon a Church arose, by her endowed
In memory, she said, of murdered Guy,
Upon the very spot where he was slain,
Which many worshippers were wont to crowd,
While she behind them often would remain
As some affirmed, in prayer to mitigate his pain.

And one dark eve, the children looking in
From Arba Court, there found her kneeling still :
'What! Sister here,' they say, and soon begin
To fear, so pale she looked, that she was ill.
'Too long she prays' they whispered, wondering much,
Because she answered not with wonted grace
To their appeal, nor noticed a soft touch.
They fled to Paul, who came but to survey
The glory shed by Angels o'er her face,
Who had bent down to spirit her away
And leave God's signature upon the soulless clay.

And whither then, and what? I know but this—
To be with one we love is simple Joy,
And that sheer toil below Above is bliss—
No need for her to change her life employ,
But only be with him, to be in Heaven.
And Guy—doth he remain in travail sore?
I asked a week of days ; and all the seven
Replied in sunny glow and moonlit spell,

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

'Time's worth declared, the agony is o'er.'
'Tis told, not only now thro' disc and bell,
But all pure Nature's joy unmarred by aught from
hell.

Have they gone for ever,
The dead whom we so bewail ?
Are we sure they never
Float by on the morning gale ?
Doth the sun ascending
Lead none in his golden train,
With our spirits blending
To breathe away grief and pain ?

In the music of mid-day
Do some in the azure height
Sweetly sing of a hid day
To dawn with undying light ?
In a reverie tearful
When thrilling to rainbow tints,
Are we suddenly cheerful
Thro' what a veiled seraph hints ?

In the hues of even
Are holy ones robed, to shew
The delight of a heaven
Which fades not with sunset glow ?
When a ripple flashes,
Would silvery saints recall
A shore whereon dashes
No wild wave to foam and fall ?

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

Is the starlit splendour
Their gaze from the realms of light,
Who in vigil tender
Illumine our misty night ?
Doth the ocean shimmer
Which beautiful moonbeams kiss,
That we thro' the glimmer
May long for the glory and bliss ?



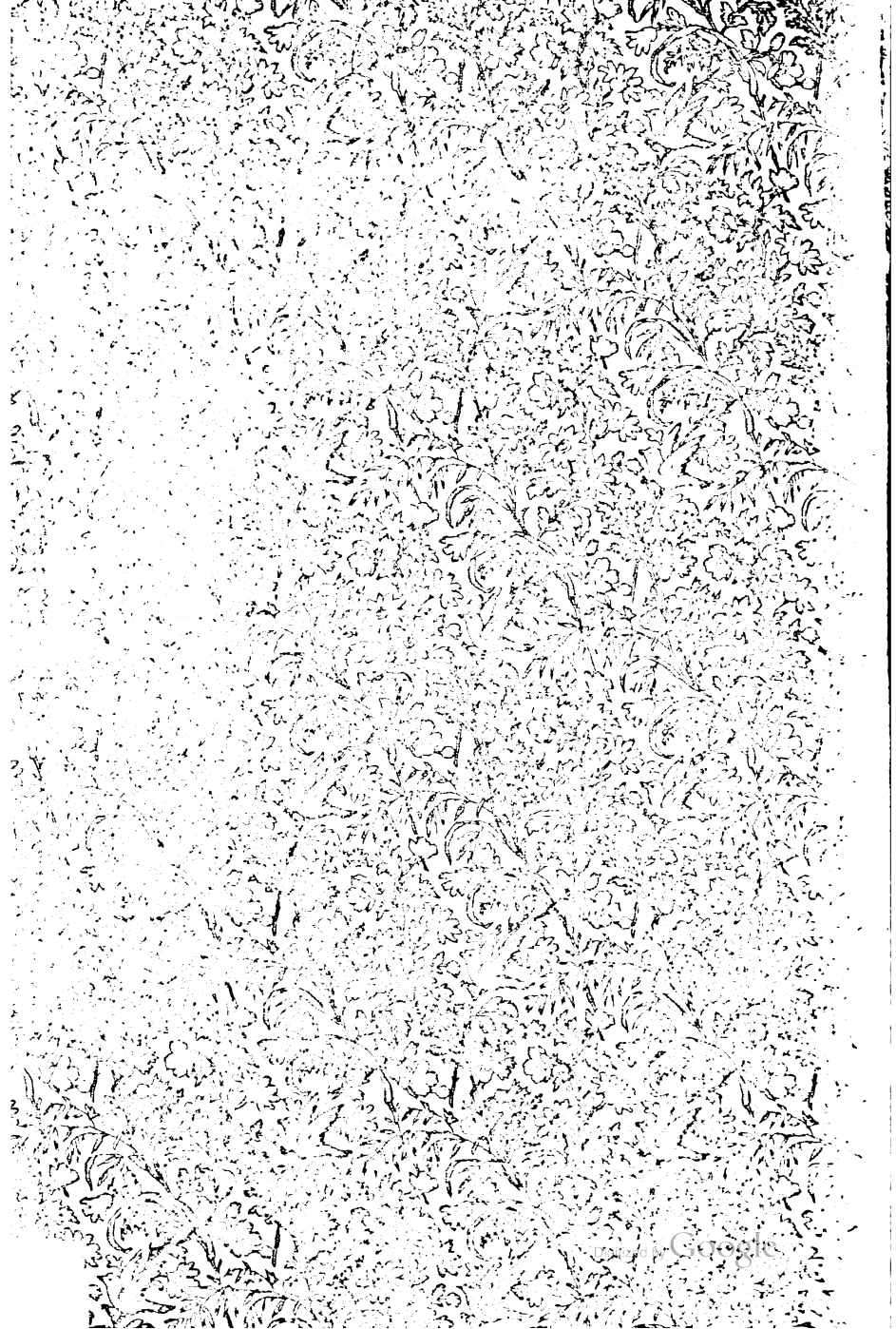
At first,
In airy flow
And ebb, the figures play
Each a due part upon the scene
Of fancy born from a creative brain.
The story told, how long will they remain ?
While human want doth keep them green—
At best a little stay.
Forthwith they go,
At worst.

'Tis well !
Life is a span,
Whose worth no mortal solves ;
Nor is one thing quite what it seems.
With the bright Present hurrying to the Past—
With Fact unreal should vain Fancy last ?
What face lives not to die, in dreams ?
Each form in Fact dissolves :
He rose, did Man,
And fell.

THE CLOCK OF ARBA

Fear not
A future shut
From aught till it hath done
Whatever it hath power to do !
The faces glow while they deserve to live,
The forms will move, if true delight they give ;
Else they but flame, and fade from view ;
Nor, like the setting sun,
Remembered—but
Forgot.





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